

**Kofi Anyidoho**  
(25 July 1947 - )

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- "Scholarship and Vision: An Introduction" in Cross-Rhythms: Occasional Papers in African Folklore, edited by Anyidoho et. al. (Bloomington: Trickster Press, University of Indiana Folklore Institute, 1983);
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"Divine Drummer: Drum Poetics in Brathwaite and Okai" in Black Culture and Black Consciousness in Literature, edited by Ernest N. Emenyonu<sup>u</sup> (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1987), pp. 197-210;

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The Fate of Vultures: An Anthology of Entries from the 1988 BBC "Arts and Africa" Poetry Award, edited by Anyidoho, Peter Porter and Musaera Zimunya<sup>mu</sup> (Oxford: Heinemann African Writers Series, 1989);

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- "Musical Patterns and Verbal Structures: Aspects of Prosody in an African Oral Poetry", Black Orpheus, <sup>6 no 1</sup>~~6~~ (1986): <sup>27-44</sup>~~27-44~~;
- "African Creative Fiction and a Poetics of Social Change: Sembène, Ngugi, Armah", Komparatistische Hefte, 13 (1986): 67-81;
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- "The Complex Simplicity of Children's Literature: A Reading of Ghana Motion and The Brassman's Secret", Legon Journal of the Humanities <sup>6</sup> (1992): <sup>51-62</sup>~~51-62~~.

Kofi Anyidoho aroused considerable enthusiasm from reviewers with Elegy for the Revolution (1978), his first published volume of poems. Since then, with each subsequent published collection, he has strengthened his claim to pre-eminence among African poets of English expression. His poetry has appeared in journals and magazines in Africa, Europe and America, and already his work has received considerable scholarly

attention from critics in Europe and Africa. Although he is probably better known as a poet, his achievement as a scholar is by no means slight. He has published an impressive body of articles and book chapters in publications from New Zealand, Germany, France, <sup>Y</sup> ~~A~~ugoslavia, the United States, the <sup>United Kingdom,</sup> ~~USA~~ and several African countries. He is on the editorial board of several journals in Ghana and has been guest editor of Matatu, a journal of African culture and society which is published in Amsterdam. As a poet, he belongs to that select group of verbal craftsmen and women who have successfully fashioned a distinctively African voice out of that ambivalent legacy of colonialism, the English language. His work has won many awards including the Valco Fund Literary Award for Poetry in 1976, the BBC Poetry award for "Arts and Africa" in 1981 and the Poet of the Year in Ghana in 1984.

Anyidoho was born on 25 July, 1947 at Wheta, the small town on the Keta lagoon in the Volta Region of Ghana where, twelve years earlier, another famous Ghanaian poet, Kofi Awoonor, had been born. His mother, Abla Adidi Anyidoho, was herself a composer and cantor of traditional poetry, as was the uncle, Kodzovi Anyidoho, who was responsible for the poet's early education; another uncle, Agbodzinshi Yortuvor was also a poet.

There is no doubt that that corner of Ghana possesses a rich poetic tradition. The three great poet-cantors, Vinoko Akpalu, Komi Ekpe and Amega Dunyo, whose work is compiled and discussed in Kofi Awoonor's Guardians of the Sacred Word were from nearby. Further, Henoga Domegbe, into whose elegaic poetry Anyidoho himself has conducted research, was from Wheta. It is this rich traditional poetry which is <sup>to become</sup> ~~to become such~~ an important resource for Anyidoho's own work.

Of his early education Anyidoho himself speaks with characteristic gentle humour in his interview in Jane Wilkinson's Talking With African

Writers:

I became a bit of a truant; not basically because I didn't want to go to school, but there were some problems, and I stayed out of school for a year or two. Later on, my uncle, Kodzovi Anyidoho, sent for me.... I was brought up by this uncle: he sent me to school, based on a kind of "instalmental" education - I was in for a while, out for a year or two and back in there.

He did complete primary school despite his rather precarious way of going about it, and proceeded to train as a teacher for four years. It

was as a student at the Accra Teacher Training College that he began to contribute his earliest poems for publication in the Talent for Tomorrow series, anthologies of prose and poetry from students of Secondary Schools and Teacher Training Colleges. On leaving training college, Anyidoho taught for a while at Nkoranza in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana before entering the Advanced Teacher Training College at Winneba to study for a specialist diploma in English. Upon completing the diploma two years later, he taught at Achimota School, arguably Ghana's most famous secondary school.

In October 1974, already a teacher of some experience, he entered the University of Ghana to study for his first degree. Ghana was then under the military rule of General I.K. Acheampong who in January 1972 had overthrown the civilian administration of Prime Minister, K.A. Busia. It was fashionable then for young and radical Ghanaians to see the Acheampong government, initially, as representing a revolutionary and populist dispensation which contrasted to the supposedly pro-Western and elitist regime it had overthrown. And yet it should have been possible right from the beginning to catch hints - particularly from Acheampong's first address to the nation - of the moral and ideological

bankruptcy which lurked behind the revolutionary facade.

Disillusionment was inevitable and Anyidoho's first published volume Elegy For The Revolution, is largely his response to that period of his country's history.

Graduating in 1977 with an Honours degree in English and Linguistics, Anyidoho taught for a year before going to the United States to study for a Master's degree in Folklore at Indiana University. From Indiana, he went in 1980 to the University of Texas<sup>at Austin</sup> to work for his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature which he obtained in May, 1983. His early impressions and feelings about America provide the subject for the poems in Part Four of A Harvest of Our Dreams. Impressed, as African visitors usually are, by the abundant resources America offers, Anyidoho still retains his critical eye and sense of humour:

You talk to me of books, Koku? O well and hell  
they have them all down here: a monster home  
all full and fool of books. Half of these are  
mere verbiage or hot dog shit. Half the other half  
are strict matters of cold Theory...

Since January 1984, Anyidoho has been based at home in the University of Ghana where he is currently Associate Professor of Literature, Acting Director of the School of Performing Arts and member of the Management Committee of the W.E.B. Du Bois Memorial Centre for Pan African Culture in Accra. His duties often take him outside Ghana - as Visiting Scholar at Indiana and Cornell, as External Examiner at the Universities of Botswana and Sierra Leone, as guest speaker and conference participant all over the world; but always he returns home. The poet who appeals to an absent "brother" not to "forget the back without which there is no front" has himself been admirably loyal to his country, refusing to opt for a more comfortable life outside, though opportunities for an easier life as an expatriate must undoubtedly be available to him. His intense commitment to his traditions, his abiding quest to speak authentically about what it means to be a Ghanaian and an African in our time imply logically a commitment to living in Ghana and Africa. He is married to Akosua Anyidoho and they have two daughters, Akua, aged 20 and Akofa, aged 14.

In many of his finest poems, Anyidoho creates a persona and a voice that derive directly from the traditional verbal arts of the Ewe people. Not

content simply to have grown up in the tradition, he has also made the poetry of his people the subject of some of his own research and has published several scholarly papers on Ewe poetry. Thus steeped in his native traditions, he has been able in some of his best work to recreate in English not only the idioms and images of traditional Ewe poetry, but also its rhythms and cadences. He draws particularly on such poetic genres as the funeral dirge or song of sorrow and halo or song of abuse. Another traditional form of verbal art which is important in considering Anyidoho's poetry is the sub-genre which one might label as invocation, the poetic appeal to the spirit of the dead or the attention of the living in order to convey an important request, advise or sometimes abuse. The result of the poet's apprenticeship was already evident in the relatively early poem, "The Song of a Twin Brother", which first appeared in Okike in 1975; *and also in the journal "The African Voice" in 1976.*

*See also "The Song of a Twin Brother" in Okike, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1975.*

Atsu e e e!

Atsu e e e!

Do not forget the back without which there is no front.  
Dada is still alive but grown silent  
And full of songs sung in a voice  
That hints of a heart ~~is~~ overstrained  
With the burdens of a clan without Elders,

Our roof is now a sieve      Atsu.  
The rains beat us,      Beat us,  
Even in our Dreams,  
And the Gods they say are not to blame.

Some foreign commentators, noting Anyidoho's strong links with the traditional poetic forms of his people, have labelled him an Ewe poet. The label is limiting: it negates Anyidoho's effort to speak for and to a more heterogenous national entity. It also fails to recognise the variety of styles of which this poet is capable. His latest collection, AncestralLogic and CaribbeanBlues, is entirely different in tone from the dirge-like cadences of his earlier work. In a recent article in the ~~Autumn/Winter 1992/93 edition of the~~ Newsletter of the African Studies Program at Indiana University, Anyidoho describes himself as bi-lingual; as someone who aspires to write both in English and in Ewe: in other words, while conscious of his commitment to his ethnic roots, he is also very conscious of the fact that <sup>he</sup> belongs to a wider polity and speaks to a more general audience.

Brain Surgery, Anyidoho's first collection of poems, won him while still in manuscript form, the Valco Fund Literary Award for Poetry in 1976, though the collection was not published until 1985 when it appeared in the Earthchild volume. Several of the poems had, however, been published before in journals such as Okike and African Arts.

The importance of this collection is in what it reveals of the poet's first real attempts to find his voice as <sup>an</sup> African poet writing in English. Some of his early efforts to adopt and adapt traditional Ewe poetry to serve his own ends are found in this collection; equally in evidence here is his wish to use poetry as an organ of social and political commentary. It would be wrong, however, to assume that the only style in which the poet was experimenting was the traditional one. In a number of these poems he speaks more directly in the tone and diction of a university scholar of the time brought up on the then typical poetic diet which would include Wordsworth, Yeats and T.S. Eliot whose echoes can be detected in these interesting lines from "This World Must Go":

Trapped between the Eternities

we sell our humanity for things that do not count  
prop our broken selves against  
the crumbling hills of these nuclear wastelands

The age of prophecy is gone

Our soothsayers have taken to praise singing  
their visions blurred with  
distortions newly manufactured  
in secret labs of  
Mankind's suicide squad

This is a fine expression of the poet's disenchantment with a world which he considered excessively materialistic, but the imagery of "nuclear wastelands" and the expression, "prop our broken selves against the crumbling hills...", recall an Eliot landscape; just as "we sell our humanity for things that do not count" recalls Wordsworth's sonnet, "The World is Too Much Us" in which he too complains about a world become excessively materialistic. Indeed, the appeals in Anyidoho's poem to Buddha, to Moses and to Jesus establish the speaker as a solitary visionary much like the persona of Wordsworth's sonnet or the Teiresias of Eliot's "The Waste Land". It is not for nothing that Anyidoho himself

will later in his work mock this tendency towards vatic posturing in his writing.

4. The opening poem of the collection titled "My Song" is important for several reasons. The poet tells us in a note that this poem is in part a translation of and in part an elaboration on an original Ewe song by an oral poet from Wheta, his birthplace. It is as if the poet at this stage is an apprentice learning by almost direct imitation from a master. It is relevant to recall here the fact that several of Kofi Awoonor's early poems were similar reworkings of Akpalu's songs. In this translation/elaboration of another's poem, we nevertheless discover a persona who recurs in many of Anyidoho's own poems. This is the poverty-stricken figure in torn cloth who usually shuns the centre of affairs. Looked down upon in scorn by more fortunate kinsmen, he is the object of derision among callow youth. He is however proud of his gift of song, and sees it as his destiny to sing the truth regardless of who is offended by his song. He is a typical figure from the traditional Ewe songs of sorrow. Thus, not only the poetic style, but even the bold commitment to speak of public matters is something Anyidoho derives from traditional poetry.

The style of "My Song" - a style that is to become characteristic of the poet - is oblique and relies on proverbial utterances to convey its message:

I sell My Song for those with ears to buy  
It is to a tree that a bull is tied  
You do not bypass the palm's branches  
to tap its wine

An African proverb is of course inherently poetic: it is a concrete and picturesque expression of an idea, an objective correlative, to borrow T.S. Eliot's term. Thus this poem, which might appear to have no unity, is in fact a series of objective correlatives on one central idea or set of ideas. A poem written in this manner has the vividness and indirectness of an allegory. "Song of a Twin Brother", one of the finest poems of this collection, illustrates this feature further:

You forget  
Atsu my father's former son  
You forget the back without which there is no front.  
Papa has lost his war against hernia.  
Seven Keta market days ago,

We gave him back to the soil.

And Dada is full of Nyayito songs

sorrowing songs sung in a voice whose echoes

float into the mourning chambers of our soul.

The third line above has the pithiness of a proverb and is a particularly pictorial way of conveying the idea of the wrongness and futility of denying an essential part of one's self. But in fact, the entire extract employs <sup>deliberately</sup> selected figures and situations which tell a story that translates into and gives concrete expression to the idea of a people abandoned in their misery by a more fortunate relation. Many of Anyidoho's poems are allegorical in this sense: they employ characters, events and situations - in effect, they tell a story which not only conveys a message, but evokes feelings.

The themes of this early collection are mostly the same ones which the poet will deepen and extend in his later work. There is the concern with his country which he presents as a joyless, drought-stricken land to which neither dawn nor Christmas brings the promise of relief from misery ("A Dirge for Christmas"). Further, the poet sees the entire nation as guilty in the destruction of their motherland owing to their

fascination with Western things and the consequent<sup>2</sup> "negation of our Past" ("A Dirge For Our Birth"), but most culpable are the leaders and intellectuals for whom he recommends "a pre-mortem autopsy" ("Brain Surgery"). Also, in "Shattered Dreams" we find the recurrent theme of the greed of the leaders of his country and what it does to the general populace. Consequently, in several of these poems, such as "This World Must Go!"; "The Inevitable" and "The Rise of the New Patriot"; he calls for change and regeneration.

Another theme found in this first collection which will be explored further in his later work is the tendency among his educated countrymen<sup>3</sup> to abandon the old homestead<sup>4</sup> in favour of easier lives in other places. The poet cautions in such poems as "Agbayiza" and "The Song of a Twin Brother" that this betrayal not only causes suffering for those who are left behind, but also destroys the ones who selfishly abandon their kinsmen. And in "Go Tell Jesus" we find a stark and youthful expression of the poet's perennial quarrel with the messengers of Christianity regarding what they did to Africa's ancestral values. Thematically, Brain Surgery is a precocious collection giving promise of the coming harvest.

Elegy for the Revolution (1978), Anyidoho's first published collection of poems, proclaims its dominant mood as elegaic. Consisting of poems written between 1975 and 1977 when it had become clear that Ghana under Acheampong's military rule was "heading for trouble", as the poet puts it, the collection is at times also very mocking<sup>iv</sup> tone. But this mockery, so evident in such poems as "On My Honour", "Radio Revolution" and particularly "Oath of Destiny", has not been sufficiently remarked by commentators who tend to dwell on the mournful elements. This is understandable for it is in this collection that the poet reveals truly how much he has learned from the traditional dirge of the Ewe people.

Several of the poems, however, derive from a different traditional genre, namely, halo or song of abuse, the genre Kofi Awoonor popularized so dramatically in his poem, "To Stanilaus, the Renegade". Anyidoho's poem "Taflatse" - the title can be roughly rendered as "Pardon my language!" - which is included in this collection is a halo poem pure and simple. In a manner typical of the genre, the poet presents himself as a person who has been unjustifiably provoked by the character he proceeds to verbally humiliate. The speaker is something of a braggart

confident in the fact that he holds both the moral high ground as well as the superior verbal skill in this contest against the offending adversary. He taunts the opponent, called Sadzi, with references to his shamelessness and drunkenness in having pawned his only underpants for a pot of tsukutsu, a traditional brew. He accuses him of the criminal sexual incontinence of attempting to rape a virgin in a public lavatory, and of the abomination of fathering a child with his own sister.

Whether this poem is simply a literary exercise in weaving new ropes onto old ones or whether it was also inspired by an actual event is not important. What is important is that this use of outrageous hyperbole to mock an adversary provides one of the ways in which the poet speaks of the leaders of his country. This is the voice of defiance and the affirmation of hope → the necessary counter<sup>✓</sup>balance to the elegaic voice.

A case in point is "Oath of Destiny" where his indictment of the leadership of his country and particularly some elements of the Christian leadership is couched in these terms:

You cover your rotten sores with borrowed  
velvet robes, coat your diseased teeth with  
stolen gold, and walk our corridors with  
the Bible on your tongue, selling the gospel  
for weekly collections of silver.

The speaker, claiming to be the grandson of Africa's true deities, Chukwu, Oduduwa, Obatala, Xebieso and Sakpana, accuses these Christian ministers of deceit and hypocrisy and of swindling the poor. In this, the poet returns to the theme announced in the first collection with the poem, "Go Tell Jesus": Also, the Pan-Africanism which will later become so prominent in Anyidoho's work is hinted at in the fact that the speaker sees himself as the scion not only of Ewe deities, but of <sup>Igor</sup>~~Ibo~~ and Yoruba ones as well.

The predominant mood of Elegy For the Revolution, however, is that of sorrow as the poet expresses deep unhappiness with the conditions in his country. The military rulers, who in 1972 seemed to hold so much promise for the youth and particularly the students, "their partners in revolution", had by 1974 become pot-bellied, arrogant and, in many cases, wealthy, while cynically exhorting their countrymen and women to

die a little for the motherland. Bribery was rife as was a tendency among soldiers to administer what an influential journal of the time, The Legon Observer, dubbed "instant justice", ie., the brutal beating and humiliation of anyone who appeared to challenge their arrogance. The rift between students and the government had already opened up before Anyidoho entered the university, with the demonstrations which followed the beating of a student in the Volta Region and the consequent closure by the government of the universities. During the poet's years as an undergraduate, relations between students and the administration got progressively worse as students increasingly challenged the government they had once supported. Early in 1975, a Sudanese student at the University of Ghana was killed by a stray bullet in the course of the brutal put-down of a workers' strike at the university. In the following years, a few more students would be killed, and the country would be reduced to beggary mostly through the uncontrolled mismanagement of its economy. The revolution had indeed "gone astray into arms of dream merchants" as the poet puts it in the poem, "Elegy for the Revolution".

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The poet, responding to these conditions, presents his own young life as having been completely soured by the pervasive national decay. What might have been moments of personal happiness, for example, the 22nd birthday of a loved one only provokes in the poem, "A Song For Silent Fears", a composition that "carries the slow rhythm of a funeral dance". Indeed these poems read like lyric versions of Ayi Kwei Armah's novels, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born and Fragments, with the recurrent motif of the aborted festival. Drawing on imagery from the traditional dirge, the poet presents himself at times as the sacrificial victim who calls upon Avakpata-Avazoli, the Ewe god of war, to immolate him in order to appease "the vampire", the creature that sucks the life out of his countrymen. At other times, as in "My Last Testament" he is a mourner and a pauper who owes a debt to his orphan clan, *ia*, the people of his impoverished nation, and who with appropriate epithets invokes the spirit of a comrade killed in the struggle:

Adonú Adokli  
Dancer' - Extra'-Ordinary  
who threw dust into Master Drummer's eyes  
So you've gone the way of flesh  
danced on heels in a backwards  
loop into the narrow termite home,

and swears to the departed one that he who lives on will not abandon the fight:

Whatever befalls the panther in the desert  
The leopard would not forget the jungle war.

But perhaps the finest poem in this elegaic mode is "Dance of the Hunchback": One of the despised of society, the hunchback is another of Anyidoho's figures for the poet, just as in another poem of this collection, "Dogs"; the poet is "only a madman in your market-place" wishing only "to howl and howl all day". Orphan, madman, hunchback — these are the images by which Anyidoho expresses the status of the poet in the Ghana of seventies: he is one of those "on the world's extreme corner" as Vinoko Akpalu puts it in one of his songs of sorrow; he is an object of contempt.

"Dance of the hunchback" opens with four masterful lines in which the speaker describes himself as a pathetic figure dragging his ungainly mass "along the quiet drains of town" leaving "the paved streets to the owners of the earth". In the following section the speaker, in heavy cadences, announces the death of his brother, "his mother's other only

son" - a curious phrase which probably carries the influence of the Ewe language but also suggests that in the eyes of the speaker the dead brother was the only real relative he had, apart from their probably long-dead mother: the reason for their exclusion from the extended family being their "innate poverty". The speaker then lists the expensive parting gifts which wealthy kinsmen have brought, while he can only go down on his knees and offer the only gifts he can afford: a tear and a song. The poem concludes with a section in which the speaker, having compared himself to a crab and hedgehog - both insignificant creatures - offers this final glimpse of himself as he tries to dance at his brother's funeral:

Mine is the dance of the hunchback  
In the valley behind my hill of shame  
I do my best to fall in step  
with rhythms of grace and pomp  
But the eyes of the world  
see only a moving bundle of fun  
and upon my chest they heap  
a growing burden of scorn.

The poem is a truly excellent illustration of Anyidoho's ability to express in English the mood of the traditional dirge; but does it say

anything about Ghana? Like others in the collection, it is an allegory of the sharp polarization that had taken place in the poet's country. On one side are such figures as the hunchback, the howling madman, the helpless fish in the bowl of cooking oil, the abandoned lover on the beach, the dispossessed peasants, the houseboy, the widow, the mourner, the sacrificial victim. Ranged on the other side are the figures of the vampire, "the renegade sons of our soil", the "brand-new men gone slightly drunk public wine", "statesmen at state banquets", "prowlers of the night" - in short, "the owners of our earth".

The next collection A Harvest of Our Dreams (1984) consists of poems reflecting the mood of the period leading to the end of Acheampong's rule and the brief dispensation of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) under Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings in 1979. Some of the poems are also poetic accounts of the poet's feelings about the USA in his early months there. The volume is in five sections.

The poems of Seedtime, the first section, continue the stylistic and thematic concerns of Elegy For the Revolution. For instance, the very first poem, "Mythmaker", is a response to the shooting of three students

by the security forces during a demonstration against the government at the time of Acheampong's fraudulent Union Government campaign which sought to abolish party politics and perpetuate Acheampong's rule in a quasi-civilian disguise. The poet adopts the persona of an elder who bemoans the absence of the children of the homestead and looks forward to their return, but is at the same time anxious about their coming back, ashamed of what has transpired, with his cowardly connivance, during their absence. What has transpired, of course, is nothing less than Ghana's destruction to the extent where kenkey, the ordinary person's staple food, had risen in price - and diminished in size - to a point where the poor could not afford it.

But they will sigh to see how for six seasons  
our mothers fed on new dirges  
our common kendey grown so lean  
we needed a decree to insure her health  
our scholars, deployed from campuses  
into ghost communal farms,  
walked the streets at dawn like zombies  
peddling posters proclaiming final obsequies  
for the revolution that went astray.

A typical feature of these poems is the note of hope which always creeps into the decidedly elegaic mood.

Though our memory of life now boils  
into vapours, the old melody of hope  
still clings to tenderness of hearts  
locked in caves of stubborn minds.

This poem, like practically all the poems of this section and like many in Elegy For the Revolution, is meant to be heard rather merely read silently to oneself. Like a great deal of Anyidoho's work, it is poetry intended to be performed to an audience. It opens by establishing a slow mournful pace through repetition and carefully measured pauses, all of which create the effect of a chant rather than of speech:

The children are away  
The children are away  
The children  
These children are away

These lines become a refrain which is repeated at various intervals throughout the poem except at the very end where the line changes from "The children are away" to "The children will be home". In between the

repetitions of the refrain are larger segments in which the speaker tells of what has been happening during the children's absence and finally of what will happen when they do return. The effect of the poem is that of an oral recitation which as it moves forward along the narrative line keeps going back to restate its theme.

The second section, Akofa, is interesting for its attempt to recreate the voice and outlook of a traditional character. One might say that this was Anyidoho's version of The Song of Lawino, but with more variety of style. The part entitled, "Awoyo", for example, is in the style of the traditional song of abuse, while the next part, "Fertility Game", attempts to recreate and embellish the love songs of young girls at play in the village moonlight. The entire section is a series of sharply realized vignettes, but the portrait of a village schoolmaster which we find in the part entitled "Tsitsa" (Teacher) is perhaps worth quoting in part if only to underline the fact that there is humour in the poet's work:

He talked about Mawu Yehowa without swallowing saliva.  
May be Mawu was his Grand Father.  
As for Englishi, he could speak it better than an Ako.

Sometimes his pupils licked those big big words  
rolling down his tongue into his he-goat beard.  
Sometimes too those rolling words fell down on his belly.  
He had the belly of a toad and he always  
talked pulling up his ancient trozasi.

Ako is the parrot, renowned in Ghanaian lore for its eloquence and, jocosely, for its fluency in English. The theme here is the suspicion of bookishness and especially of foreign learning which the poet restates in several other poems, particularly in the pidgin-English letter-poem in the ensuing section of this collection. The teacher mocked in the above quotation represents the beginning of the African's removal from himself, from the living traditions of his people.

Section four, My Mailman Friend Was Here, provides further illustration of the poet's willingness to experiment and take risks with his craft. The poems in this section are in fact letters he wrote from the United States to loved ones at home, in particular to his friend, Kwakuvi Azasu. One of these poems is in pidgin English, some are in the contemporary idiom of the time they were written, while yet others retain the traditional turns of phrase that we have come to expect from the speaker

in Anyidoho's poems. Because one suspects that the incidents recounted in the poems are autobiographical, there is an occasional incongruity between the character who speaks in these poems and the poet who is in fact recounting his own experience. An example is this self-consciously wide-eyed view of an Xray from a poet who was probably quite familiar with the procedure:

I tripped I fell I broke my wrist.  
In the medicine house of the miracle-making race  
They trapped the image of my bones broken beneath  
The skin beneath the flesh...

Section five, Mokpokpo, is again an assorted collection. The title means hope, and hope was engendered by the removal of Acheampong, the announcement of a programme to return Ghana to civilian rule, and, above all, the coming to power of Jerry Rawlings who held power for only a few months before returning the country to an elected government. The poet's hope however is mixed with apprehension in view of the history of betrayed dreams which has been the country's lot since independence. Thus in "The Panther's Final Dance" he cautions the would-be civilian

rulers of Ghana to be suspicious of flatterers who will seek to sway them from their arduous mission:

And so the Hippo seeks  
our stool of thorns our crown of thunder?  
Let him beware the final dance of  
soothsayers who now become our praise gatherers.

And in "Our Fortune's Dance" he first celebrates "the <sup>raw</sup>~~raw~~ energy of a certain rolling stone", i.e., Rawlings, but bemoans the uncertain destiny of a nation<sup>s</sup> of bees who have lost their Mother-Queen, a people who have lost their very soul, drunk instead on "The sweetened wine/of alien royal palms".

The poem "Pan-Am 188", though not the final poem of the collection, nevertheless rounds it off effectively. It can be read as the poet's epitaph for the leaders of the Acheampong era who were executed soon after Rawlings launched his house-cleaning exercise.

I shall stand before the gods  
and plead guilty to a certain callousness:  
such terrifying joy burying kinsmen  
with no sudden feel of loss, no tears nor emptiness.

As usual, the poet speaks in the allegorical mode. The speaker is a mourner returning from afar for the funeral of a kinsman and finding that he is unable to feel any grief. Pursuing the allegory, he explains, using at first very traditional imagery, why he feels no loss at this funeral:

So often in our time we've lived as  
orphans in our home, picking crumbs from garbage heaps  
cracking kernels with our teeth while our late uncles  
stood by asking stupid questions about bad harvests and  
negligence of old Nyame and rainmakers. They even  
talked some jazz of technical aid and capital investment  
codes.

It is interesting how the allegory slips in the last sentence above, with the poet abandoning his carefully crafted traditional idiom and launching into modern diction in a kind of spontaneous overflow. Does his strong distaste for the overthrown regime get the better of him artistically? The final effect of the poem is however clear: though he will often enough write a song of sorrow on the tribulations of his motherland, the passing of Ghana's corrupt leadership inspired no dirge.

Earthchild, the next collection (which was published in 1985 with Brain Surgery) contains some 27 poems written mostly during the poet's years in the United States. As always with this poet, the private and public themes are linked: his loneliness at being so far from home and his need to be rooted in his native soil; anger and frustration caused by news from home and the arrogant condescension of some Americans towards him; his growing understanding of what other peoples have had to endure in order that some sections of the world may live in opulence; the friendship and support of friends during the long American years; the indomitable spirit of black people all over the world - all these themes shade into one another. For the sake of convenience, Earthchild could be summed up as presenting a conflict between "Earthchildren" and "Moonmen". Earthchildren, in the context of the growing Pan-Africanism of this phase of the poet's work, are black people the world over, victims of the ravaging appetites of the master race, the Moonmen or Moonchildren, the masters of technology and the self-proclaimed owners of the earth. The poet thus becomes a mythmaker for his race, licensed by his sojourn in the Babylon of America at the time of the invasion of Grenada and the murder of Walter Rodney, an event he responds to in the

poem, "Rodney", not in the slow cadences of a dirge, but in the rhetorical tones of a song of war.

Where were the children of Tenge Dzokoto  
when Moonmen came at midnight hour?  
Our hunters swear they saw the midnight dance  
the feast on flesh  
the feast on warm entrails  
They swear they heard the screams of infant Souls  
Where then were the children of Thunder  
while Moonmen ride the midnight storm  
vomiting scron upon our infant joys?

To a certain point, Earthchild is in a continuous thematic line with A Harvest of Our Dreams. The poet, in such poems as "Hero and Thief" and "News from Home", is still concerned with the mismanagement of Ghana's affairs, and in fact the same images of the stolen harvest, the thief who comes by night, of a desperate people having "to crack palm kernels with their teeth", of dunghills and the orphans who inhabit them and of the complicity and prevarication of intellectuals are carried over into this collection. What is strikingly different is the urgency

of tone that we find in this later collection with the poet at times fiercely questioning the validity of poetry when what seems needed in the face of the blatant thievery going on in his country is a more direct kind of corrective action.

However in "News from Home" the poet indicates another villain in addition to the thieves at home, namely, the bearer of "Crocodile condolence". The poet expresses angry impatience with the expressions of sympathy from some of his American hosts for the disasters at home, since he is convinced that these spoilt people cannot even begin to understand Africa and cannot therefore sincerely sympathize with the continent's problems. Defiantly, he informs those who daily await the demise of Africa that they wait in vain, for the children of Africa will overcome their present difficulties. However, America and the West are not simply guilty of pretended sympathy. A poem like "Slums of Our Earth" offers a portrait of the kind of person sent by "USAID and IMF and AIC" to expound his latest "model/for 3rd World Development". In an angry outburst against the cold, inhuman and misinformed abstractions of the expert, the speaker in the poem declares

It is lies, all lies  
The Nimas of our land  
are not the lost children of rural minds  
The Harlems of your world  
are not the natural growth of man's desires  
They are born and bred on drawing boards of  
architects and engineers of urban growth  
They are the dispossessed children of  
the mansions on the other side of town.

The theft at home is but a small part of a wider, grimmer crime in which the powerful, as individuals or nations or race, have historically dispossessed the weak, and continue to do so.

The title poem of the collection, "Earthchild" is like the ringing finale which brings together the concerns of the entire volume. If the collection is predominantly rhetorical in style, expressing a quarrel between Earthchildren and Moonmen, "Earthchild" is supremely musical. Here is no quarrel, but celebration. The poet, living in America and with the example of jazz and the blues before him, celebrates these musical forms as symbolizing the black people's or Earthchildren's resilient ability to regerminate and flourish even after they have been uprooted and dumped on alien soil. Jazz is beauty sprouting from the

vilest ugliness: the perfect symbol of Anyidoho's conception of the black race as the people who refuse to die.

The argument of the poem is itself straightforward. It tells of a fertile ancestral time when the people of Africa flourished, until the arrival of shrill missionaries and brutal slavers who scattered Africans and brought them to strange places and sought to destroy their belief in themselves. But in vain, because song is the essence of Earthchildren: thus while the slave master can rob Africans of their language, he cannot eradicate their capacity to sing. And through music Africans rise again, tall and erect and beautiful in spite of the chains, the rope and the whip.

The experience of the poem, however, transcends any lame summary of its message. It is an overpowering torrent comprising waves of sound and a gallery of images which change and return. The effect is that of a sung-message which employs refrain, repetition of words, repetition of whole sections and the use of typography to convey rhythm. It is a poem which re-establishes the poet as cantor in the oral tradition, but the voice here is a new one which bears traces of "polyrhythmic miles of

jazz" and mentions Miles Davis and Donny Hathaway while alluding to James Weldon Johnson, and also makes reference to Haiti, to Havana in Cuba, to Harlem and to many of the other places where black people have suffered and survived. "Earthchild" is no less than a Pan-African anthem.

The last poem of the collection, "Homing Call of Earth", which is best read together with "Bad Debt", is important for the way it links the personal and public concerns of this collection, the way it links the poet's own situation with his general view of Africans as Earthchildren. The poem is a deeply moving affirmation of Anyidoho's commitment, as Earthchild, to his native soil. The speaker in the poem - and here again the identification of poet and persona is almost inescapable - has now completed his studies in the United States and has spent months on end waiting for the slow Ghanaian bureaucracy to process his air ticket back home. Once at home, he will perform the rites necessary for his regeneration, for taking root again in the difficult terrain of home.

I'll take my sandals off  
plant my feet among these ashes  
left by the season's many bushfires

My skin again shall feel  
the wet nuisance of dawn and dew  
I'll hurry me up those old bush paths  
down those farms where once there grew  
the foods on which we grew to life's fullness  
even in those times of storm

Life for him assumes significance only when he serves his native land  
and its people, and only when he in turn is nourished by the fruit of  
that soil. Compared with such nourishment, the attractions of the  
Western world have no charm.

But against the distant gleam of shooting stars  
I chose and will choose again and again  
The Homing Call of Earth  
I am Earthchild turned to ghost  
as festivals of Moonchildren.

Thus as true Earthchild the poet refuses to sell himself to an alien  
culture and feels bound to promote the well-being and values of other  
Earthchildren, African people all over the world.

Since the publication of Earthchild with Brain Surgery, the poet has devoted considerable energy to promoting the dramatic presentation on stage of his work and of the work of other Ghanaian poets. This is of course a logical extension of the oral impetus of his poetry. The poet, Atukwei Okai, and others had already in the 1970's established poetry readings as a very popular art form in Ghana, but Anyidoho has pushed the dramatic performance of his poetry several stages beyond simple readings, transforming the performance into a communal total art form which includes music, gesture, mime, dance and, above all, the involvement of an audience. His poem, "Children of the Land: A Sequence for African Liberation", was composed for this kind of presentation, but the real landmark ~~even~~ was the premier performance early in 1986 of the dramatization of a selection of his poems entitled Earthchild and Other Poems. The performance involved Abibigromma, the resident theatre company of the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana. The advantage of this mode of presentation - Anyidoho would prefer "publication" - of poetry in a society that is predominantly non-literate is obvious: it restores poetry to the community. Such was the success of that experimental performance that since then Accra has seen several productions of ~~that~~ kind.

— AncestralLogic and CaribbeanBlues (1993), the poet's most recent collection, marks in many ways a departure from his previous ways of speaking. To a large extent, though not completely, he moves away the predominant style of the traditional dirge in order to explore a new kind of voice which is altogether more austere. The collection is in three parts, CaribbeanBlues, AncestralLogic and Santrofi Anoma, united by the poet's consciousness of himself not simply as an Ewe or Ghanaian, but more profoundly as a black man. The recurrent theme throughout the poem is the assessment of the black man's place in history and contemporary world affairs, his bonds with other races, such as the Ameri<sup>y</sup>di<sup>g</sup>ans, who have been swept away by the cruel hurricanes of history, his need to refuse to cooperate in his own marginalization. Thus, while the national theme is still present in this collection, especially in the Santrofi Anoma section, what is most striking in this volume is a more emphatic pursuit of the Pan-African theme, a search for bonds of feeling not only with Africans in other countries of the continent, but with people of African descent in the diaspora, and, beyond that, with all peoples who share a common heritage of callous exploitation.

- { The volume opens with a lyrical prose poem, an Intro Blues, to use the poet's own term, in which he explains the personal circumstances that gave rise to these poems and the concerns they express. Many of the poems come from journeys: to Germany for a conference on The New Literatures in English; to Cornell University where in 1990-91 he was Visiting Faculty Fellow of the Program in African Cultural Studies; to Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. But for the poet, all journeys are aspects of the same journey: "the forever journey into SoulTime", a blackman's imaginative and intellectual pilgrimage towards the "recovered vision" of a future free from the sorrow and rage that characterises his history. The purpose behind these poems then is to move Africans the world over towards a more positive view of themselves to contribute to the healing of the psychic wounds inflicted by the invaders. This entails the repudiation of the half-truths concerning their own history on which they have been traditionally fed. It entails their knowing about the resistance mounted by native peoples all over the world to the European invader. It entails knowing about the achievements of their ancestors in Egypt and elsewhere without losing sight of their present-day misery.

It is in CaribbeanBlues that these concerns are most movingly expressed.

The first poem of the section recalls, in imagery at once economical and powerfully evocative of ultimate devastation, the genocide of the Taino-Arawaks, the original inhabitants of the island Columbus usurped:

So they wiped them out  
Drowned their screams  
Burned their nerves and bones  
And scattered their ashes  
Across the intimidating splendour  
Of this young history of lies.

But the sorrow and anger of this memory modulates into hope – a hope founded on the undying example of the Taino themselves who preferred death to subjugation to an alien God.

In the dying howl  
O Hurrican Columbus  
We yet may hear once more  
The rising growl  
Of the Taino Chieftain  
Who opted out of Christ's Kingdom  
Where they insist the butcher dog  
May come to sup with ArchAngel and God.

And this for Anyidoho is of one the main values of history - as a source of inspiration in the struggle to establish a more just order. Further, he sees enshrined in the songs and dances of the downtrodden that smouldering resilience which will one day erupt and consume the crushing structures of the oppressor. Ancestrallogic, a concept he borrows from a Zairean missionary working in the Dominican Republic, is his name for this element of African liberation. It would appear, according to this theory, that black people have survived by virtue of a tough ancestral spirit which has sustained them through hardship. It is this spirit that he tries to evoke in the second part of the poem "Republica Dominicana".

The poet's journey through the Caribbean is one which arouses in him shifting emotions of sorrow, anger and hope. There is for example in "San Pedro de Macoris" the very personal note of pain in telling of the experience in Haiti when having witnessed for himself the appalling conditions on the sugar plantations he is unable to drink the coffee offered him by his host since the sugar for him had become bitter. There is the anger in "Domingo Blues" as he contemplates the tourists, "inheritors of stolen feasts", who flock yearly to the Caribbean to have

a good time, unaware or oblivious of the bloody patrimony they enjoy. There is also the poet's sympathetic musing in the poem, "HavanaSoul", on the fate of Cuba in the monolithic era following the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Cuba is for him the little nation that affirmed itself and refused to accept a holiday-resort destiny designed in arrogance by a mighty neighbour - a shining example to the African wherever he may be.

After the grief, the anger, the musing, the Caribbean journey concludes with a splendid image of hope. The poet converts his circuitous journey from Cuba to Africa which takes him to Gander, Madrid, Zurich, Abidjan and finally Accra into a symbol of the divisions and barriers that prevail among African peoples, and looks forward to the day when

.....tired at last from endless  
trailings of lost purpose and lost vision  
we mark the only straight route from Ghana to Havana to  
Guyana  
and and on and on to Savannah in Georgia of the deep deep  
South.  
With AfricanaAirways, we can renavigate the Middle Passage,  
clear  
the old debris and freshen the waters with iodine and soul-  
chlorine.

There is no doubt that these are among Anyidoho's finest and most mature poems. Technically the poems of CaribbeanBlues show a new kind of economy of expression, with an austere dependence on the bare image and a diminished reliance on mournful cadences designed to evoke pathos. The oral quality is still here, but it used to rouse to action rather than call forth tears. Pictorial power seems to have supremacy over aural power in some of these poems, for example "Renewal Time" and part three of "Republicana Dominica" subtitled "Tarantula". These poems have an emblematic quality which is different from the predominantly narrative and allegorical quality of his earlier work.

But Anyidoho is a poet who does not discard, preferring to select the style that suits each different occasion and theme. In "Lolita Jones" in the AncestralLogic section of the volume he speaks in an ~~Afro~~ Afro-American idiom. In the poem, "Santrofi", in the Santrofi Anoma section in which he responds to the imprisonment without charge or trial of a brother poet and scholar, the Malawian, Jack Mapanje, he employs again the recurrent cadences and proverbial diction of the dirge, using Santrofi, the dilemma bird of Akan folklore, as a symbol of the

ambivalent status of the artist in society. It is the artist who has the vision and the duty to tell those truths which political leaders need to know but hate to hear.

It would be incorrect to argue that Anyidoho has abandoned his concern with Ghana in favour of a wider Pan-African concern. Rather, he sees his country as exemplifying in many respects the general condition in which many African peoples find themselves partly as a result of the dislocating encounter with Europe and its persisting aftermath. In a world where the African, wherever he may be located, is seen as a distant follower in the forward march of humanity, Anyidoho is important for two reasons. His creative appropriation and mastery of the colonizer's language and his ability to make it speak to a world audience in a distinctively African voice is in itself a victory over the shackles of colonialism. Further, like his compatriot Ayi Kwei Armah, with whom he shares quite a wide coincidence of concerns, his work makes a powerful call to his nation and race mesmerized by the white gleam of the West to turn away from their own death. His work will always reflect those political and social developments which affect the destinies of African peoples wherever they may be. He has said that

he will write more in his native Ewe language; there is no doubt that his work in English will also grow, bearing evidence always of the orality and mood of his traditional source, but unafraid to experiment with other styles.

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