

The Poetic Rhetoric of *Mom'a Njoku* a.k.a Simon Mol (Moleke Mo-Njie)

By BATE BESONG

In the Second Annual World Poetry Day sponsored by UNESCO and organised by the editors of *Poetry Today*, Simon Mol, with a rifty drum between recitation of his poetry, celebrated the Anglophone muse on the world centre stage. A journalist with the English language *Warsaw Voice*, Secretary General of Asylum seekers in Poland, now, resident in London he is author of *Africa... my Africa* (Polish version *Moja Afryko!* Verbinum Warsaw, 2002) and *Goddess of Mount Africa* (Polish translation *Bogini Z Mount Africa*, Express Poligraficzny, Lodz, 2004). Mol's first collection of verse has been translated into Hindi while *Bogini Z Mount Africa*, subtitled "an autobiographical anthology of metaphysical love and mundane challenges" is dedicated to one of the greatest Polish poets, Julian Tuwim, anti-fascist, one-man pressure group on behalf of "the common man".

Modern Anglophone poetry (Bate Besong, Ba'bila Mutia, Nkarawi Nfor, Tenu, Ishmael Chi-Bikom, Yvusimbom, Ilongo, Kishani, Simon Mol) is a product of two distinct socio-aesthetic forces, namely, the received traditionalist aesthetic practices and the aesthetic over determined by colonialism and Re-Unification. Poetry of this colouration can be read as symbolic of the wider selfish political bitterness and acrimony that has been imposed on Cameroonian peoples by the emergent class of Jean Paul Sartre's "white-washed lies".

Writing from his enforced exile home(s), Mol's poetry incarnates a rediscovery of the intellectual, and demonstrates the elixir of thought to negate accepted limits and open the way to a new future. It is quite clear that he thinks of his poetry not as an object of wit to be enjoyed for itself, but as a paradigm of passionate communication. Mol's

poetry is therefore an excellent example of how a poet can compress much meaning into few words.

His highly charged and provocative lines represent the response of the creative psyche and sensitive conscience to the extra ordinary misery and suffering of the African human condition. Figurative reading of *Africa... my Africa* or *Goddess of Mount Africa*, then, should involve careful exploration of connotative values and context since Mol's verse can be said to be successful because he drives home his critical statements and elevates basically situational problems to the level of the enduring. The English poet, Rachel Billington, lends credence to this assertion when she describes his work as being imbued with "a delicate sensibility and unique vision".

Though he writes free verse, which cannot be scanned in terms of iamb and trochees, yet Mol's poetry is rhythmical because of unconventional relationships of images, lengths of lines, word groupings to sound, topography used to direct proper reading of his poetic rhetoric; alternation or omission of standard practices of punctuation. Imagery is vital to style, but Mol's poetic style includes more than conciseness and imagery. Inspired by the goddess of Mt. Africa, mothered by Nyangona-Muna through the volcanic womb of Mount Fako, and fathered by the god Epsa Moto, images in the poem of that title reinforce this attitude: "*I vomit from my depth / Dirts of your stately crimes / In volcanic tongues of flames / My anger in flowing lava / Head of cold depth of Victoria sea - / Earthquake declare my appeal for peace*" (*Epsa Moto*; p.37). Since the major theme of his verse continues to be loss and separation one way for the reader to appreciate the individual musical quality of *Africa... my Africa* is to read each poem in the collection aloud. If the reader unites the eye, the ear, and the reasoning capacity of the mind, he will be better able to engage in oral interpretation, the name given to the art of reading poetry aloud effectively and meaningfully. Implicit in the above observation is that analysis of, or, imitating the sound of Mol's poetry should never be divorced from one's investigation of its meaning.

“Landscape reach across / to embrace horizons. Making me to dream... / telling me to read my history to myself (“Distance Tale” p 25).

In the poem “Mandela’s Page” we are confronted with truly revolutionary pedagogy by a new mythmaker and alternative creator of culture *When doubt dawns with dread / an horror reigns merciless - / when hope escapes the helpless / and darkness rules like forever- / Truth takes form in a humble soul / strong of pity, he moves with tides in silence / and in patience / brings to ruins evil fortresses seeming to last forever” (p.39)*

Mol’s images work by analogy rather than equation; they do not mainly describe, they evoke spiritual and political realities, thus: *“Drink from the Limpopo / and perch on the belching volcano of Mount Fako / The Owls Son’s song says the ghosts of our times governors / will echo the answer from their dark caves, / haunted by their treacherous acts... their remains will poison the soil for the emergence / of a rootless race “(p. 29).*

By using allusion, metonymy or oxymoron, the poet invokes details or meaning involved and adopts them to his purpose. Metaphor for instance is a direct substitution for one element or another in Mol’s creative rhetoric. It is a key anchor to his poetic style:

“When will you rise from slumber to shake / Down dusts from your eyes, Africa / When will Pharaoh roar, / Or Magi turn bombs into bread Africa (Africa... my Africa, p. 11).

The real force of Mol’s poetry is in its reliance in its power of inferences, implications, or suggestiveness of words, phrases and figures of speech. It is this crucible of domestication that has inexorably led the poet to a re-definition and evaluation of his creative rhetoric as this has become salutary to the wide-ranging transformational dialectic that characterises our contemporary epoch.

It should be quite clear to any trained reader that poetry like other literary forms is a departure from the normal forms of language usage. It is a departure enriched by

various forms of speech. Take away the connotative force of literature, and we no longer have dramaturgy, prose fiction or poetry.

Criticism of recent Anglophone poetry is essentially the summary – commentary style of analysis, which locates themes, structure, artistic forms and media as asymmetrical tropes in the poetic canon. It is therefore neither logical nor evaluative since it is merely descriptive, sentimental and propagandistic. Being wholly deficient in unravelling abiding social commitments beneath the veneer of imposed “obscurantist” linguistic and stylistic forms, such “scholar-critics”, adjudge, metaphorical reconstruction of events in contemporary history and politics in a way that has brought fully the glory and dignity of modern Cameroon poetry as “obscure” and thus socially irrelevant.

This kind of “criticism” is generally referred to as “Neo Tarzanism” (Soyinka, 1975), FESTAC Consciousness “(Amuta 1981), CHINWEITURE (Osofisan, 1984).

Simplistic appraisals of what is an experimental, highly diverse, and alternative artistic tradition as “obscure” “truncated” or “ridiculous” is the product of a *bolekeja* frame of reference whose obsolete critical compasses are reminiscent of the anthropophagi in Shakespearean lore whose “heads grow beneath their shoulders’.

Neo-Tarzanism or Chinweiture as evaluative criteria does not proffer the necessary perspicacity of vision and scholarly detachment to domesticate a universal critical criterion to suit the temper and subjectivities of the modern Anglophone Cameroonian poetic canon. We salute the arrival of *Mom'a'Njoku* aka Simon Mol (Moleke Mo-Njie).

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