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## **The Blind, the Deaf and the Music: An Inter-textual Concourse in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road***

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### **Abstract:**

*The Platonic dilemma partly inheres in the subsisting misconception of the capacity of mimesis to power the vehicle of state craft leading painfully to Oscar Wilde's self-effacing polemics that "all art is quite useless." Consequently, this paper demonstrates that creative art – imaginative Literature – figures fruitfully to power state craft to the useful and to the overall positive in the management of men and means. We deploy the resources of the Inter-textual frame to interrogate the progressive, reactionary dialogics on corruption and misappropriation, dimensions of neo-colonialism and mal-administration. Underscoring the imperatives of change by the reining-in of inordinate and self-decapitating, self-destructing power in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road*, we detail how literary creativity and its creators labour, often successfully, sometimes with orchestrated ignominy, to whip power into line for the advancement of the collective till and the protection and perpetuation of the collective will in the Nigerian commonwealth and the African space for the over all betterment of the globe entire.*

**Keywords:** *platonian dilemma. intertextuality. intertextual concourse. blind. deaf music. imaginative literature. parliament of vultures. cemetery road.*

### **1. Introduction**

What is art if not communication, the bodying forth of the "airy nothing" of imagination ....?" Art thrives on the urge to share, to make known, and if possible, pass into common currency what once was a private fancy in the agitated flux that is the artist's mind...*all art seeks to affect* (my emphasis, Osundare 5).

When Oscar Wilde ends his "Preface" to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with the rider: "all art is quite useless," he scores higher than Plato in the act and art of denigrating the arts. Plato had quarreled with, and banished from his ideal republic, only poetry – drama and later prose fiction are equally implicated. But Wilde condemns all art as useless claiming that "the only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely," just as the maker of something useful may be granted pardon "as long as he does not admire it" (4).

Wilde's meaning does not stray from Archibald Mcleish's suggestion on the nature of the poetic art that "a poem must not mean, but be" ("Ars Poetica"). Since Plato, the quarrel has raged over art versus nature, the utility of art, art for art's sake and art for commitment, for the edification and reification of moral codes and the consequent protection and promotion of society. This study is concerned strictly with the latter.

The Puritans viewed as deplorable, any poetic endeavour which purports to exact a corruptive influence on social morality and good tastes. This is taken to the heights by Stephen Gosson, himself a puritan. In his controversial *School of Abuse* (1579) Gosson boldly carpets poetry in particular and all forms of imaginative writing in general. A dramatist and a man of the theatre, Gosson like Plato, takes a sober account of the evil impacts of much that was shown in the theatres of his day but consoles himself in the fact that "burnt children dread the fire" (xxv).

This is what forces Phillip Sidney, to whom Gosson mischievously dedicated the abuse, to write his *Apology for Poetry* where he stoutly defends "poetry from the abuse of children and nitwits;" and as Adams notes, "to stem the tide of a civil war among the muses" (*Critical Theory Since Plato*, 155) This quarrel is bound to continue as long as men live, think, and put pen to paper. The divides are bound to continue along centres of logo-centric interests, of high- low, medium-level, or even never-never cultures depending on social, economic, ethnocentric as well as historic-cultural indices within the axial concomitants of fray.

## 2. Art, Commitment, and the Imperatives of an Ordered Society

In an article entitled "African Literature and Social Commitment" Julie Agbasiere notes that "social commitment means that the writers get involved in the efforts to make society a better place to live in" (Opata and Ohaegbu 71). Thus, commitment requires that writers should "contribute to the realization of the society's aspirations and to the solution of society's problem" (71).

There are various schools of thought on whether the writer should concern himself with contemporary socio-political issues and concerns of his society or simply concentrate on achieving artistic beauty strictly for the sake of creativity. The contentions are as diverse as human perceptions and persuasions are variegated.

As regards African writers there is probably a greater bias toward commitment than the obverse. This obviously results from virtually all the indices that make Africa different and some of her experiences peculiar; to inform Achebe's position that to ignore the big issues of Africa's experience is to behave like that absurd nitwit who chases rat while his house is on fire (*Morning Yet*, 254). This view is in tandem with Georg Lukacs' insistence that "it is difficult for the writer really to free himself from the currents and fluctuations of his time and, within them, from those of his class" (*Historical Novel*, 305).

Soyinka's own submission is that the writer should strive with his work to prevent the present day society from collapse instead of wallowing in "the discovery of gems of the past" ("Interviews"). Sartre feels it unthinkable that Literature should not be committed insisting on the necessity for universality of its outlook,

So that the writer must put himself on the side of the majority of the (then) two billion starving, if he wishes to be able to speak to all and be read by all. Failing that he will be at the service of a privileged class and like it, an exploiter (quoted in Ker 3)

In a similar vein, Ngugi (*Homecoming*) states that "being a sensitive needle, the writer registers with varying degrees of accuracy and success the conflicts and tensions in his changing society" (4). Romanus Egudu gives voice to the earlier Ngugi position, describing the writer as a "God-sent gadfly to his society... persistently endeavouring to rouse the society from its social, political, moral and intellectual slumber" (4). The Egudu rejoinder amply answers to Soyinka's exhortation of the writers to strive to attain social vision in their works embodying

A creative concern which conceptualizes or extends actuality beyond the purely narrative making it reveal realities beyond the immediately attainable, a concern which upsets orthodox acceptances in order to free society... (*Myth*, 8)

However, Erubetine (*Poetic Existence*) opines that the real soldier for the people is not the writer. To him, in spite of the writer's "sensitive needle" claim, if he does not go for a practical hunt, like Ifeajuna, Okigbo, Wilfred Owen and Adaka Boro, he cannot kill a fly ("Lecture Notes", 2003). Even though Erubetine's "cheek" is no worse than the submissions of one black revolutionary cited in Ker, who quips: "I aint seen no poems stop a .38/... I aint seen no metaphors stop a tank," we are aware of extant instances where a metaphor stopped a bullet, or became the cause of raining of bullets or prophesied impending doom consequent upon misrule by an inane leadership; like in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen also Die* and *Nwokedi*, respectively George Awoonor also reminds Soyinka and by extension the rest of us that "taking a militant political position is not the same thing as writing militant creative works," stressing that "activism is not a substitute for art and should not be confused with it" (Agbasiere 74).

Agbasiere observes that it is this manner of social vision that the likes of Achebe, Armah, Aluko; and I add, Irobi, and even the relatively low-profiled Nwamuo achieve in *A Man of the People*, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Chief the Honourable Minister*, *Hangmen Also Die* and *Nwokedi*, and *The Squeeze*, respectively. Agbasiere is equally of the view that "the role of the writer as a Messiah focuses on the extent of the writer's personal involvement in the actualization of his social commitment" (74)

J.P. Clark, himself an astute and world-acclaimed writer, separates both roles, stating that "the writer writes, the soldier fights" (74-5).

Christopher Okigbo holds a similar view with Clark as he does not see how the writer should mix both roles: ... as an individual he could assume this sort of role but I don't think that the fact that he is a writer should entitle him to assume a particular role as an educator. If he wants to educate people he should write text books. If he wants to preach a gospel he should write religious tracts. If he wants to propound a certain ideology he should write religious tracts (quoted in Agbasiere 75)

In accord with the above, Chinweizu et al underscore the role of the writer as encapsulating his social responsibility willingly to engage in physical attempts to right the societal wrongs as a private citizen; and as a public figure who engages the resources of his trade, his writings (74)

All the above do not suggest in any way that the voices over the role of the African writer are by any means univocal, rather than controversial. A good deal of creative writers as well with literary critics still vociferate on the need for the writer to eschew the slippery parts of sociological commitment in favour of craftsmanship for the sake of art.

Although Paul Jean Sartre encourages commitment in writers with the injunction that "Living in a world that demands action... a devout dedication to art is a luxury" (*Literature and Society*, 4), Ker would rather that social issues though present in literary works, should be implied rather than stated or demonstrated baldly (7). For, although these issues "form a part of the substances of life within which his instinct as a writer must struggle," art is betrayed if a writer should subordinate his writings to the service of a cause" (7).

To which Soyinka's ready answer is that "whenever the writer in his own society can no longer function as conscience, he must recognize that his choice lies between denying himself totally, or, withdrawing to the position of a chronicler and post-mortem surgeon (*Myth*, 10)

Yet, Ker believes that contrary to the African writer's commitment to politics and sundry other social issues, and belief that to do otherwise is fruitless, what he needs is not a contest with the politician on his turf but to understand that his own role is not the same as that of the politician (10). Ker wants the African writer to "accept the full implication of being a writer... in the Conradian sense," a sense which conditions the writer to turn literary life "to memories and seek discourse with the shades, unless (he) had made up (his) mind to write only to improve mankind..." (11).

All said, it remains to be contested, Achebe's claim that "Nkolika" –telling is the greatest. True, the story outlives the war and the warrior (*Anthills*,124),but so does it the story teller at least literally. In spite of the tendency for the likes of Eldred Jones, Eustace Palmer, David Ker and pockets of others to rile at committed African writers, Achebe remains authoritative in his conviction that "It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny (and often us)from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence"(124).

This is why writers such as the duo within the present exegetic canvas, always sing though to the deaf, the blind and the hard-hearted, the song of repentance and often prophesy the impending doom. That African writers often delineate similar concerns informs the presence of the inter-textual paradigm.

### 3. Inter-textuality : an all-inclusive Frame for Creative Crusades

Julia Kristeva's coinage of the term "Intertextuality represents an attempt to synthesize Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics and Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of dialogics. Kristeva asserts that the notion of Intertextuality replaces the notion of inter-subjectivity in the sense that "meaning is not transferred from writer to readers but instead is mediated by or filtered through "codes" imparted to the writer and the reader.

According to Plottel, Kristeva nursed the idea that "every text builds itself as a mosaic of quotations ,every text is absorption and transformation of another text"(xiv).This is akin to Mallarme's suggestion that "...all books, more or less contain the fusion of some operatic repetition: even if there were one book in the world, its law would be as a Bible feigned by nations...."(68).

The sum of Roland Barthes' disquisition on reader-response is that "in order to speak, one must seek support from other texts". Evidence of this is Roland Champagne's reading of Barthes regarding "the relationship among various speaking voices implied in the presence of an isolated speaker"(123).

Again, Jacques Derider's contention that "each utterance holds the trace of another utterance..."is akin to Umberto Eco's observation that "books always speak of other books; and every story tells the story that had already been told"(Plottel xv).

Our inference from the fore-going is that texts depend on one another and there is nothing like an original text which may not intertextualize another; no text is an island to the extent that nuances from other texts may not be adduced. No wonder Michel Foucault notes that

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut; beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configurations and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences; it is a node within a network (quoted in Selden and Widdowson 127).

Parody is an element of the inter-text. It is mimetic. Harold Bloom ,the American cultural critic cum poet offers in his "Poetic Influence" that "Poems are neither about 'subjects' nor about themselves"(Kennedy and Gioia 2189) .Bloom claims that in an attempt to write a poem, the poet reaches for the primordial conditions of the poetic principle(2189)

In sum, intertextuality is the sum of influences, parodic representations, allusions, and 'plagiarisms'; some kind of universal visiting of one text on another, one vein of knowledge on another, one socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-political imperative of society on another or similar kind of pre-occupation. One element exists because there are, or, there have been other elements upon which it preys. All creativity thus operates on the ruins or at the instance of others

This is why Norman Fairclough states that "for any text or type of text, there is a set of other texts and a set of voices which are potentially relevant and potentially incorporated into the text" (47).The notion of the inter-text is not new. It is as old as humanity even though it came to the fore in postmodernist garb. New Testament books quote from the old. Old Testament books, Deuteronomy for a count, refers to the events described in the book of Exodus(Porter 1975 makes a comprehensive study on the subject).

Again, Plato in critiquing poetry so as to deny it entry into his ideal society, makes copious use of Homer's poetry to buttress the imitative nature of imaginative literature and justify their banishment. Several texts build networks around Greek and Roman mythology, history, philosophy and literature.

Sometimes, plagiarism –a blatant and criminal disregard for authority of reference – is taken as inter-text. This is demonstrated in the case of the Spanish writer Lucia Extebarria whose poem collection *Estacion de Inferno* (2001) was found to contain metaphors and verses from Antonio Colina's work. Extebarria claimed that she admired Colina and applied intertextuality (www.plagiarismcolina.co.uk)

A few instances of proper application of intertextuality in world literature should come in handy here. John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* (1952) is a retelling of the story of Genesis, set in the Salinas valley of Northern California, U.S.A. *The Dead Fathers' Club*(2006) is Matt Haig's retelling of Shakespeare's Hamlet set in modern-day England. *A Thousand Acres* (1991) by Jane Smiley recaptures Shakespeare's *King Lear* and is set in Iowa, the United States (www.)

From the home front, Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) sourced a thematic title from W.B. Yeats' poem entitled "The Second Coming" . *Things* is also a seminal talk-back to, or, refutation of some erroneous and jaundiced views of Africa as represented by some colonialist writers like Joseph Conrad, Rider Haggard and Joyce Cary in such works as *Heart of Darkness*, *Mr. Johnson* and *The African Witch*, respectively. The likes of Ben Okri in *Dangerous Love* and *The Landscapes Within*; Helon Habila in *Waiting for an Angel*; Chris Abani in *Graceland*; and Maik Nwosu in *Alpha Song* are probably influenced by Cyprian Ekwensi's city-based novels like *People of the City*, *Jagua Nana*, *Iska* and even the later *Jagua Nana's Daughter*. All tell, in a refreshing manner stories that had been told.

The crux of our deployment of the inter-textual frame to interrogate Nwabueze's and Irobi's creative incursion in the domain of power regarding the problems of state craft and the bastardization of the collective ethos and the public till is informed by demonstrable

evidence of extant interlocking between the two creative outputs in their chastisement of inordinate power and inane leadership, specifically within the Nigerian frame .

Since power calls to power it is our contention that beauty calls to beauty too! Aesthetic beauty is demonstrable not merely in artistic fidelity but more importantly in humane artistry. The starving, the sick, the fugitive from horrendous war, from hell do not read a poem of leisure and pleasure but consume the poetic psalms of succor and solace, hence the need to sing of “what”, not just of “how” –which is what we are set to explore in Nwabueze’s and Irobi’s “singing to the deaf,” to ‘plagiarize’ the title of ChinyereNwahunanya’s inaugural lecture of 2011.

#### **4. Clever Vultures, the National Carcass and the Hurricane in Nwabueze’s *Parliament***

Vultures are despicable predators but their aspect that repulses the most is their greed as captured in Hilary Belloc’s nursery rhyme entitled “The Vulture”. Because the vulture eats between meals it is very ugly! This ugliness manifests in the fact that “his eyes are big, his head is bald and his neck is growing thinner.” At this point the teacher stresses the last line: “Oh! What a lesson for us all *to only eat at dinner!*” (my emphasis).

If the dramatis personae in EmekaNwabueze’s *Parliament*, apt representatives of national actors in the current democratic process in Nigeria ever read meaning into that simple but loaded poem –granted that they mouthed it in their infancy in the nursery school, or, got through something similar –they neither show it nor pretend to be aware of it. Otherwise, they would have lent credence to Phillip Sidney’s assertion that “Poetry is nature’s first nurse” and the teacher of all wisdom (“Apology”).

That poem is a disavowal of kleptomania, primitive acquisition of national wealth and a rat race to curry all by any number at the detriment of the rest. This forms the major thrust of Nwabueze’s swipes on insensate leadership in the present political dispensation in Nigeria.

Like some of his predecessors and contemporaries alike, Nwabueze satirizes this poverty of thought and predilection to criminal antics designed solely to satisfy the self with the common core. He is properly miffed at the danger posed by this kind of practice coming as it does from those to whom the destiny of the nation is entrusted for safe-keeping.

James Booth (*Writers and Politics*) has noted that the founding fathers of Nigerian politics set the tone for, and are complicit in this national malaise. In what Achebe latter terms “the poverty of thought exhibited in the biographies of Dr. Azikiwe and Chief Awolowo” (*Trouble*,13), Booth recalls Zik as pledging in 1938 “that henceforth I shall utilize my earned income to secure my enjoyment of a high standard of living and also to give a helping hand to the needy;” and of Awo that “I was going to make myself formidable intellectually, morally invulnerable, to make all the money that is possible for a man with my brains and brawn to make in Nigeria” (Booth 49). Achebe states that these comments “are more likely to produce aggressive millionaires than selfless leaders of their people” (*Trouble*,14)

#### **5. The Story**

The search light is beamed on the parliament where the actors, instead of being men and women of conscience are emasculated vultures gorging themselves on the elephantine carcass of national wealth at the expense of the minority voices of reason among the scheming desperadoes, against the precepts of informed, purposeful, egalitarian and selfless representation.

The dilemma of the nation of Nwabueze’s creative configuration is compounded by the fact that there is a cult of conspiracy between the two most visible and elemental arms of democratic governance –the executive and the legislature. This is why His Excellency, The President appears as a callous, insensible, arrogant numbskull of a tyrant who parries all essential issues of governance in the brusque style of old-fashioned military dictators. This too is why the illiterate food vendor-turned-legislator Madam Omeaku, alias ho-ha, the hypocritical religious charlatan Rev. Jossy, the lascivious political stalwart Mr. Brown, all in connivance with the mental midget but scheming and negatively-tuned chief Habamero, President of Parliament thwart the good intentions of Dr. Parkers, erstwhile chief of Parliament and his ally in purposeful representation, Mr. Otoho.

The two divides scheme for control of the powerful instruments of parliament for opposite reasons. Parkers and Otoho are in the minority but represent the voices of reason and purposeful articulation of the issues of the polity. They stand for due process and altruistic representation and want egalitarian conduct to govern the affairs of parliament in the higher national interest. Out-numbered, blackmailed and out-schemed, they lose out to their bellicose and cleverer opponents and barely tag along to provide sound but muffled protests in the interest of the collective.

On the other hand, Habamero, Brown, Omeaku, and Jossy with the tacit help of the chief of protocol outwit their opponents and entrench a cult of greed, Squander-mania, nepotism and poor, or, better still, misrepresentation of their constituents. To firmly root their criminal antics, they engage in all sorts of scheming to silence the voice of order and reason. They blackmail the opposition and muffle their frantic calls for sobriety in the discharge of national functions.

However, since the voice of caution could not avail, they are swept asunder by the whirlwind of revolution in the nature of Nigerian students who attack and sack the rowdy rogues on the day that their corrupt lives and thieving activities are at their apex. The students, like the hurricane of Amadioha the thunder god, visit and kill the political misfits on the day that their corrupt lives seem sweetest to them!

In this work, Nwabueze succinctly captures the national an athema, the collective dilemma and culprit of our collective woes. Like Achebe before him, he shows that “the seminal absence of intellectual rigour in the political thought” of our leaders –“a tendency to ...materialistic wooliness and self-centred pedestrianism” (*Trouble*,13) is the bane of the national process, and warns of the possible consequence of this callous disposition. This manifests in election rigging and political mischief which enables square pegs to enter round holes. This is how the articulate and altruistic Barrister Umeh loses election to an illiterate small-time hotelier, Madam Omeaku

alias Madam ho-ha in what the political mischief-makers call “a campaign of bitter-leaf soup and Canadian wife,” to show that elections are won through manipulation rather than by issues (*Parliament*,36).

Candidates are foisted on the people willy-nilly not because they can deliver in the interest of the nation but because it is strategic for the party’s image and that they have the needed connection to help siphon out the national wealth. Brown conspiratorially tells Madam ho-ha that the clique’s intention for bringing Dr. Parkers into Parliament was because “having lived in the United States for fifteen years we felt he should have enough connections to help us put money in foreign banks;” so, “it wasn’t difficult for (Brown) to negotiate the right figures for him” just as he did in Omeaku’s case (*Parliament*,10)

Otobo, Parkers’ ally in Parliament echoes this when he tells parker:

They felt that they needed somebody who would help them to transfer their loot abroad. When you started talking about accountability, they wrote you off, chose another person and gave him the appellation of professor to make your doctorate sound meager (*Parliament*,35)

Conversely, Rev. Jossy who was called Reverend during campaigns “because we thought the title could purchase us some credibility from the voters. And it worked!” (*Parliament*,11), remains loyal to the cause of greed and latches on to criminal misappropriation of public funds, retains his position in the comity of the emasculated clique. As Brown sloganizes, “politics is no child’s play!” (*Parliament*,8,9,11).

Nwabueze shows satiric bitterness at the way mediocrity and bottom power are entrenched in the public domain. His statement in this regard is that matters of national importance are poorly handled as a result of this trend and the nation always breeds for it. It is not enough that Omeaku who knows virtually nothing about law-making is brought in by subterfuge to make law, the clique would go further to make her Secretary of the House due to hers and her daughter Nkechi’s hot legs. The result is that parliament is saddled with a secretary who cannot read minutes of House proceedings, let alone understand its contents. The rebarbative effect on the fatherland is that deliberations in parliament are at best servile except where they border on loot and subterfuge.

Yet, to complete the orgy of insensitivity, Nkechi, young, nubile but hardly out of secondary school is packaged for the lascivious appetite of His Excellency, The President as Chief Press Secretary. What results is that the arrogant President is normally ill-prepared to entertain questions bordering on national interest and brusquely tells the press off, to his eventual ruin.

Democracy dividends in the form of ministerial nominations and appointment of chairmen of boards are done not on merit and who can deliver the goods but on the basis of party loyalty and settlement of loyalists no matter how dumb they may be, and no matter how dishonest. When Parker opines that the House “cannot confer chairmanship of Boards on people merely because they helped the party,” he is over-ruled on the grounds that “Honesty and integrity are relative,” and that the custom is that “Board membership (is)reserved for people who helped the party during elections” (*Parliament*,74)

Why do intellectuals moan in pain from a distance and in the words of Parkers “abandoned their nation to nonentities?” Are they mere paper tigers? Nwabueze’s take in the mouth-piece of Otobo is that

The demand on public officers is too harsh. The fear of the unknown is the problem of our public officers, and the bane of political development in this nation. They are required to resign from their jobs before engaging in politics. They are afraid to do it, and prefer the devil they know (*Parliament*,35)

As the elders say, he who commits incest in the night does not reckon that it will soon be day light. Thus, after holding the nation by the jugular for quite a spell, after silencing the voice of reason Dr. Parkers and Mr. Otobo through detention on trumped-up charges, and while in the process of sharing choice public lands among themselves Okigbo’s brand of thunder calls and sacks and arrests the buffoons in the likeness of the Nigerian youths to whom the future of the country belongs.

And so, Nwabueze’s point is clear: if the Nigerian political class persists in selfish conduct and personal aggrandizement, then the onus is on the most effective segment of the nation –her youths –in conjunction with the intellectuals to take up the challenge and destroy a cabal that oppresses all.

## 6. Countering the Counterfeiters in Irobi’s *Cemetery Road to Life*

The quantum of Esiaba Irobi’s creative output is essentially violent theatre. A checklist of his craft like his debut prophetic work set in the Niger Delta –*Hangmen also Die*, *Nwokedi* and *Cemetery Road* –the subject of the present discourse –are all violent and speak of the macabre. Even his collection of poetry tilts heavily toward violence

Why is he then obsessed with impudence, with activism, with revolution and the shading of blood in his works? The reason is simple: he is expressing anguish over the turn of events in his environment, his anguish inheres in the fact that “when a blind man cries” no one “sees the tears beading his eyes,” and none “sees the storm raging in his soul” (*Cemetery*,24). He is angry that in spite of the plea for mercy to the executioner, his victim is often killed with reckless abandon. So, instead of a plea, the captive chooses defiance the only part to freedom available and viable. *To gain his life the captive must prepare to lose it.* For Irobi the road to freedom is the way of blood and people should be ready to make sacrifices to appease, contain and apprehend the gods of greed and the forces of fear and collective anathema.

## 7. The Story

The above is what Irobi sets out to capture in this play. An acute enemy of oppression and oppressors, he tries to resist and by extension urges us to resist the forces of imperialism, neo-colonialism, military dictatorship and all forms of oppressive tendencies and rules that have held the nation by the jugular from the beginning of our nation’s existence

Dr. Mazeli Anyanwu, radical University teacher in the theatre Arts Department is engaged to produce a documentary for the BBC, in conjunction with two BBC correspondents –Hazel and Douglas. The subject is colonial seizure of fertile farmland from a beleaguered

peasant group in Northern Nigeria close to the capital territory, Abuja. The Oxford-trained BBC correspondent, Douglas, representing imperial and neo-colonial interests, wants a denigrating portrayal of the peasants and their suffering to show and delight British viewers at home that the Africans are still backward, as an impetus for continued justification of slavery, imperialism, and neo-colonialism.

However, Mazeli discovers the true impetus for the project: that the BBC is not interested in the human angle like the rape of some of the dispossessed in the process of dispossession and the criminal complicity of the imperial representative not to pay any reasonable compensation to the peasants; coupled with the resultant blinding of some of them during their massacre. Mazeli decides to discontinue the project and circumscribe or confiscate the master tape containing the almost concluded documentary.

As all efforts to take the tape from Mazeli fail the BBC correspondents report him to Nigeria's military junta in power and out of fear of repercussions from the British Government the army dispatches some callous soldiers to worm the tape out of Mazeli's possession. This sets the stage for the confrontation and brutality and resistance that ensue.

Meanwhile, Mazeli has a plan to use one stone to kill two birds. He is in league with his students billed to present a show on the subject of the tape to the military President that evening, at the Nicon Niga hotel, to kill the President and free the nation from tyranny and backwardness orchestrated by the military interregnum.

Irobi makes a lot of points with *Cemetery*. By seizing the tape that offends Africa's sensibility, Mazeli justifies the call for Africans to rise up and contain any further imperialist meddling with Africa. But, he also shows the laughable self-debasement and denigrating self-effacement in which African dictators and even democratic leaders wallow to appease the white man even when Africa's interest is at stake. Rigor Mortis' boss, the Captain explains why they must force the tape from Mazeli: "We have come because we don't want any trouble with the British Government." This is in sharp contrast with the army Captain's boasts as they molest Mazeli and his wife Somadina and ransack their house with insolent impunity: "Yes, we have the world in our hands. And whenever we like we spin it like a top and watch those who cannot cling fall off like ants" (*Cemetery*,14).

Again, respect for the fundamental human rights with regard to personal privacy, rule of law and fair hearing do not count with the military dictatorship. Thus, when Mazeli opts to plead his case against the British agents, the agents of oppression tell him:

...as far as the State Security Service is concerned, and by that I mean the Federal Military Government, by which implication means or includes the President...what is happening now is the only hearing this case will get anytime, anywhere, any place(*Cemetery*,16).

It is in further demonstration of this callous arrogance and madness that Mazeli is tortured at the military base and finally injected with poison on the orders of the Big-Stout guzzling Colonel, alias Pinochet, head of the military torture machine. This is also a commentary on the intellectual emptiness of the agents of coercion and torture with ironically interminable resource for inventing all manners of their satanic trade forged in hell

Military dictatorship is a reign of terror. It is mired in intrigues and random waste of innocent lives. As Lawani reveals when Somadina protests Mazeli's innocence of any attempt to overthrow the government

He does not have to (plot a coup), to be executed by the present Military Government. All they need as evidence is a reliable army or security officer desperate for promotion to mention Mazeli's name and say he saw him talking or drinking beer with the coup plotters...we have had three secret executions since January this year. In each execution, there were at least seven civilians(*Cemetery*,73).

It is in Lawani, the Military President's personal Aide de Camp that we see in its starkest sense the mentality of members of the ruling cabal. Their true intention at all times is to line their pockets and salt away as much of the public bequest as they can grab. Matters of patriotism which military dictators often tout as reason for their incursion in governance actually counts for little in the recesses of their minds as they can sell the nation for a pot of pottage. This is how Lawani abuses the privilege of classified information and state security secrets which he sells to the C.I.A. for a fee at the expense of the nation.

Lawani has no regard for even the president he guards, "we haven't got a president who is worthy of assassination or a sacrifice as priceless as my life." Rather, he states that what his charge, the President deserves is "the electric chair or public execution by strangling," in the manner of Noriega (*Cemetery*,81)

Professor Madubunjoala represents that crop of despicable intellectuals who boot-lick the dictators and betray the robust and articulate crusaders of freedom and justice. It is therefore no wonder that he should side with the security men in their ploy to liquidate Mazeli. Irobi presents Madubunjoala and his ilk, as the true problem of the nation. Afraid and envious of Mazeli's intellectual guts and patriotic integrity as the budding light in the Department, Madubunjoala like his name –man is the curse of nature/the earth, he schemes to destroy Mazeli's files to deny him promotion then tries to spy on and ferret out non-existent evidence of Mazeli's involvement in a coup plot.

Mazeli is a lone voice crying in the wilderness of integrity and national conscience. He is tortured but is not afraid of torture. He is injected with poison but rather than being deterred, he becomes more resolute to enforce his will and recover the integrity of his nation. He wins in the end. For, even though he has the opportunity of saving his life through the overtures of his friend, nemesis, and repentant "evil spirit", Lawani, he chooses no easy way out. He must carry on with his plan to confront the puff adder –the military president, kill him and rid the nation of the evil.

As a mark of his success, he is able to destroy the recordings in the BBC master tape before handing it to the BBC correspondents, so that in spite of their braggadocio, the soldiers and their pay-masters lose in the end. Again, he wins as he successfully recruits his theatre students to carry on the revolution. In his attempt to evade Lawani who now tries to stop him from committing suicide, Mazeli kills himself and causes the student crowd to kill Lawani in retaliation. He had earlier bequeathed his estate to his equally idealistic and principled Journalist wife, Somadina, equal victim of dictatorship, who carries Mazeli's three-months old pregnancy. That the

embattled peasants of Kuje for whom Mazeli fights identify with him and vow to continue the struggle is a mark of victory for order, for freedom instead of acquiescence in the face of tyranny.

Thus, Irobi shows that “the tyranny of a tyrant is measured by the patience of the oppressed,” ((*Nwokedi*,44) Lawani at least, can no longer “send the C,I,A deliberations of the Supreme Military Council.” He can no longer lend his fingers “to the hands that rupture our future,” (*Cemetery*,143) but Mazeli’s converts –the students and the peasants will carry on the crusade to oust the oppressive regime now that “murder matches in their eyes with militant faces”(*Nwokedi*,45). So that even though Mazeli is an original loner, even though his itinerary seems from the start, too tall for him, he proves like in Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People* that “the strongest man on earth is he who is able to stand alone.” In which case, Mazeli successfully counters the counterfeits of national ethos. No doubt, he moves through the cemetery road of suffering and death, but then, Irobi through Mazeli proves that the cemetery road to death often leads to the Salvationist road to life, to rebirth, as we often die to live.

### 8. Contours of the Inter-text: A Summary

There are extant sites of inter-textual concourse and comparative interlocking between the texts at play. Both plays beam searchlights on the national woes and blame it on poor leadership whether of the military cabal or of the democratic dispensation. Both recommend a frontal challenge and overthrow of insensate and inordinate power of whatever build.

Dr. Parkers in *Parliament* is akin to Dr. Mazeli Anyanwu in *Cemetery* in intellect but particularly in the patriotic quest to right society’s wrongs. Both are mistaken and resisted by forces that entrench national woes. Each struggles, suffers persecution and extreme deprivation though in varying degrees. But, while Mazeli fights to the death while his agitations have the prospect of continuing through his converts, Parkers negotiates total triumph as his crusades out-rightly sack the forces of greed and mis-governance. Parkers and Mazeli each engage the youths –University undergraduates – as the critical factor in revolutions.

Lawani (*Cemetery*) and Brown, Madam Ho-ha and Reverend Jossy (*Parliament*) represent the worst forces and forms of greed. They believe that the end justifies the means. Madam Ho-ha and Lawani are typical twerps originally poor but now choose to line their pockets with the opportunity that gives. Brown and Lawani are each intelligent, unlike Omeaku but each decides to turn his intelligence against the nation and betray posterity for personal gains and filthy lucre.

Professor Madubunjoala (*Cemetery*) is akin to Madam Omeaku (*Parliament*) in immorality and licentiousness. Omeaku easily sells the nubile Nkechi, first to unsuspecting Otobo in an intrigue to oust him from the Parliamentary secretariat before finally sacrificing her on the altars of presidential libido. Madubunjoala takes undue advantage of his female students to satisfy his declining libido just as he tries in vain to activate his orgy on Fatima, the Departmental secretary. All these go to justify our observation that the minds of progressive forces to wit Nwabueze and Irobi are often similar; and particularly note-worthy is the fact that both playwrights operated in the same University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the same Department of Theatre Arts and may have held similar views on a number of national issues, often comparing notes .

Furthermore, the Presidents in both works are callous, insensate and incapable to govern. We know of the Military President’s incapacity through the mouth-piece of his personal aide, Lawani while the democratic President of Nwabueze’s creation exhibits his incapacity through his actions and utterances such as he displays during the news conference with Journalists, in addition to his criminal connivance with the Parliamentarians resulting in his failure to call them to order.

The Parliamentary intrigues in *Parliament* are carbon copies of the intrigues in the army barracks of Irobi’s *Cemetery*. While the Parliamentarians engage in political intrigues to frustrate and silence the voices of conscience and order, so as to firmly root greed and loot the public treasury dry, the soldiers manufacture phantom coups and assassinate feared insurgents, just as they intimidate through torture and out-right liquidation any voice of courage and conscience to cow everyone else and continue their orgy of loot and mal-administration.

The cult of greed among the soldiers and their goons described boastfully by Lawani to impress Somadina tags like glue with the activities of Brown, Madam Ho-ha, Chief Habamero and Reverend Jossy as they plot to rout their opponents and sit sure. Lawani boasts to Somadina:

...in this country, the easiest way to make money is to join the armed forces. That way you make millions and still be where the power is. Power and money....Somadina, I have made it. I have three million dollars in an account in New York and one million pounds in a Barclays Bank in London plus a reserve of one million in Swiss Francs in a bank in Switzerland (*Cemetery*,87 -88).

The above is akin to the squandering of one hundred million to throw parliamentary parties and share two million for the inconvenience of attending the party ,to the bargain (*Parliament*,27-8,66 -7).

Finally, both authors make use of the resources of the reformist precepts of societal change with Irobi being acutely Marxist-Leninist in outlook while Nwabueze seems more of Fabian Socialist, or, at best, Welfarist . This in effect is what determines the level of militancy in each Playwright’s dramaturgy. To the end that Irobi’s language is more militant and drips greater blood and vehemence than Nwabueze’s. This is perhaps ,because Nwabueze is tickled and exudes much humour to laugh at human foibles where the ant is burning but feels that he is merely glowing with fart.

### 9. Conclusion

This paper details the interlocking of the Inter-textual discourse in Emeka Nwabueze’s *A Parliament of Vultures* and Esiaba Irobi’s *Cemetery Road* where the creative concern of each writer is the interrogation of oppressive, repressive, ineffective and retrogressive power dispensation in the business of State craft. The position of each writer as we demonstrated is that power should always call to power so that violence done to the collective can be redressed by the violated in order to whip errant power into line.

We showed that the writer as a visioner powerfully enmeshed in literacy and creativity, as an intellectually effective member of the society, the writer has the concern and capacity to revamp society through exegetic discourse. This bears out our favouring of utilitarian art against art for its sake since the human condition in the African space calls for concerted efforts to enthrone an egalitarian society.

In consequence, our position is that “as a sensitive needle,” the writer can often take a sociological stance welding his craft with issues of the day, as we demonstrated in the drama of national rebirth and reascent Africa encapsulated in Nwabueze and Irobi. After all, if the writer lacks creativity, we do not know what should qualify him as such; if he becomes distant from issues of humanity, of polity, he may not bear the burden of his muse well. If he sings and the listeners remain deaf to his music, or, if they affect blindness, then it will not be his fault when they face *surugede*, the music of the deaf, the dance of death.

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