

'SHREDS AND TATTERS': LIPENGA'S SHORT STORIES

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When analyzing Western fiction and what makes some of it great, E.M. Forster used such terms as "pattern" and "rhythm," borrowed from painting and music respectively.¹ I shall use the term "rhythm" to describe some of Ken Lipenga's short stories and discuss what makes them interesting experiments in the genre.

Forster discusses rhythm in a story as being "brought out by a phrase crossing the story at various points in different ways or guises ... An echo or memory of an event, a speech or object appearing and reappearing."² He goes on to say that "the easiest rhythm to recognize in fiction is repetition plus a variation recurring in the work."³ The hardest is more subtle and almost invisible, although its presence can be felt in great works"⁴ The term is useful in discussing some of Lipenga's collected short stories in **Waiting for a Turn** since they depend on the use of rhythm in this sense.⁵ In actual fact, some of the stories depend entirely on this device for their internal structure. This paper argues that, although Lipenga describes some of his stories as "shreds and tatters," they are in fact "stitched internally" (Forster's phrase) together by the verbal devices of rhythm.⁷ Furthermore, it is in these very stories described as "shreds and tatters" that we find some of the most brilliant and complex experiments or innovations of the genre.

Part of the discussion demonstrates, how, through deliberate borrowing of oral narrative styles, the special effects of "shreds" and "tatters" are achieved while, through verbal rhythm, internal cohesion and consistency produce satisfying stories. Since Lipenga incorporates oral narrative techniques for his fragments, it will be necessary, however, not only to extend Forster's rhythm in written literature, but also to investigate its functions in oral story telling events in general and in the present stories in particular. The paper will, finally, evaluate Lipenga's innovations with both the oral styles and verbal rhythms in mind.

A Model of Oral Narrative Performance

A model of Malawian (e.g., Nyanja, Mang'anja, Chewa, Yao, etc.) oral narrative performance conceives of the event in the following terms.⁸ The narrator has a text to deliver to a live audience placed in a certain context. The burden of the delivery, however, lies with both the narrator and the audience: whereas the narrator has the kernel story to deliver, the audience not only receives it but helps shape its texture and progress at each stage of the rendition. In its basic outline the model is similar to Georges' later formulation of "story telling events."⁹ Furthermore, the interaction between audience, text and narrator are well described in Georges' "feedback and response" patterns in story telling.¹⁰ In the latter model the narrator stimulates the audience by the text and its performance, the narrator also stimulates himself by his own performance, the text stimulates the narrator and the audience, the narrator is in turn stimulated by the audience's stimulation. This chain reaction produces a text that lives in the performance.

In practical terms, the narrator and audience form a ritual field with certain opening, internal, and closing formulas understood by both parties.¹¹ The opening formula is

Narrator: Padangotelo (Once upon a time)

Audience: Tiri tonse (We are together)

The internal devices are several: the audience's "tiri tonse" is repeated rhythmically at regular intervals, and a song (a theme song or some other unrelated song) is sung at crucial points in the story's development. Apart from these basic devices, the internal formulas include the audience's verbal and non-verbal responses. The non-verbal responses include clapping, dancing, gestures related to the story, or other activities related to the larger context of the story telling events, e.g., roasting and eating potatoes, maize, etc. drinking water, beer, etc., smoking, taking snuff, i.e., all activities related to the real world. The verbal elements include exclamations, comments, queries, on the content as well as the manner of the story telling. These verbal expressions are related to the narration, other expressions refer to ongoing events, disgust at someone who refuses to share a roast potato, rebuke of a member of the audience, carrying on of an argument arising from an aspect of the story, referring

to the audience's own experiences evoked by the story. The narrator and audience are both aware of the possibilities of the performance taking almost any direction, even suspension, to argue a point in the story or even something that is going on outside the text. The invariant closing formula is

Narrator: Kaphuleni mbatata pa moto (Go and
take the potato off the fire)
Audience: Yapsyerera (It is burnt)

The above are the basic formulas observed in Malawian story telling events.

Stylistically, the narrative then has two aspects to it: expressions belonging to the story proper and those belonging to the real world of the context for story telling. Expressions belonging to the story include alliteration, assonance, phrasal or syntactic parallelisms, correspondence or contrast, ideophones and onomatopoeia, repetitions, dialogue, chants, formulas, etc. Expressions belonging to the story may be so structured as to produce rhythm from the world level to the highest level of the performance. Expressions belonging to ongoing activities are not so patterned in normal story telling events, although a narrator can control such events so that they occur at certain moments which may or may not coincide with his narration.

It is the burden of the rest of the paper to demonstrate how Lipenga has used the above features of oral narrative performance in some of the short stories central to his development as a writer.

The Kumbikumbi Stories

Two Kumbikumbi village stories, 'Sadaka'¹² and 'At the graveyard',¹³ and two other stories in unnamed settings, 'Pass the Calabash'¹⁴ and 'Waiting for a Turn'¹⁵ use to a lesser or greater degree techniques described above to achieve their effects. I have taken the liberty of calling them the Kumbikumbi stories since they not only share the same first person narrative mode and some of them are set in Kumbikumbi with the same named characters, but they also share the same oral narrative styles, including tags ("uncles") for the unseen audience.¹⁶ The awareness of

alive audience is apparent in the narrator's repetition of questions, comments, statements, etc., which the narrator incorporates into the progress of his own story; there are phrasal echoes across some of the stories (e.g., 'Waiting for a Turn'); some stories anticipate the techniques undeveloped in the earlier ones, others dispense with the cruder ways of the previous ones. Thematically also, some of the stories are similar, loss of a wife or a life. In fact, two stories are set at a graveyard ("Sadaka" and "At the Graveyard"), one story at a semi-graveyard ("Waiting for a Turn") is also set on Sapitwa Peak, where hundreds and hundreds of people are queueing to commit suicide by jumping over the precipice. Only one story, 'Pass the Calabash,' is in an unspecified setting, although it could be set at a graveyard while awaiting the burial of someone. All the stories have one thing in common: they are narrated in the manner of a fireside story with a live audience in mind, as the discussion below reveals. These formal elements make it possible to discuss the stories as a body of fiction demonstrating the writer's conscious experimentation with form. Each of the stories will now be discussed in turn to reveal what innovations it has gone through and to what degree it can be seen as a departure from conventional story telling.

'Pass the Calabash' and 'Sadaka'

'Pass the Calabash' is told in the manner of an explanatory tale: an unnamed narrator has been asked by his "uncles" to explain why he is "now a drunkard and without a wife." The whole story, told in the first person, is the explanation, taking place in an unspecified setting which, the reader guesses, could only be a village beer-drinking place; not in the sense of a western-type bar or pub, but "a bwalo" or an open space with, possibly, a fire in the centre around which the people sit. The calabash is passed round the circle as the story progresses.

The manner of the telling as well as the audience in this setting are important since they both echo the "fireside story": the narrator and choral ensemble with a difference. In this story it is only the narrator's voice that is heard, while the choral responses are heard only through the narrator's repetitions or echoes as he is asked to explain something, or is questioned, or the audience interjects, comments, or expresses an opinion. Although the audience

is not seen or heard, there is a strong feeling that it is in control of the progress of the story. Hence the audience has not disappeared from the seeming one-man performance. The devices used are discussed below.

First, the choral rhythmic response of "tiri tonse" ("we are together") has been replaced by "pass the calabash" of the title of the story. This injunction opens and closes the story. It is not only formulaic, it establishes the fact that the narrator is not performing in a vacuum. The narrator also ensures that the audience is with him by addressing them directly as "uncles" or "my uncles." This occurs no less than sixteen times. When he is not addressing them as such, he prefaces his remarks with "you see," or just "you __," or "listen carefully." These devices ensure direct address.

Second, it was suggested above that it is the audience that is controlling the development of the story. To begin with, it was the "uncles" who requested the narrator to reveal himself to them:

And so, my uncles, you ask me to explain why I am in my present situation. Well, listen carefully and I'll tell you the whole story, without adding or subtracting anything.

They ask questions, "Pardon me, did I hear one of you ask if my wife became bitter," to which he gives replies. The questions are also related to requests for information on terms beyond their village experience: "You don't know what a correspondence course is?" The audience expresses disbelief: "You can't believe it? But it's true, my uncles," or hazards guesses on what the wife could have done. "No, uncles, she did not ... she was not ... either," offers solutions as to what it would have done placed in similar circumstances: "What? you would have given her a good beating?" or suggests possibilities as to what could have happened for the narrator to find himself in such a situation: "Bewitched? Did you say I was bewitched by a rival at the office, someone jealous of my promotion?"

As can be seen, the narrator is forced to accept, contradict, agree fully or partially, reply, comment, argue with the audience at almost each step in the development

of his own narrative. It is as if the reader was eavesdropping at a court hearing in which both judge and jury are intimately locked in unravelling the truth. And although the audience controls the progress of the story, the reader has the feeling that it is the narrator who, despite his sometimes being forced to be on the defensive, has the upper hand as he discusses some of the trivial questions: "Love? Of course I loved her," "Ill? No she was not ill," "No, my uncles, there was no malice about it." This feeling is reinforced by the ironic, half-mocking, half-amused tone the narrator adopts throughout as he suggests that turning drunkard has helped him professionally: "My job? Oh no, I haven't lost it. In fact. I have been promoted again. I am now head clerk." And that separating from his wife has contributed to his success, that even if he sees her occasionally again, a reunion would be detrimental to him both healthwise and professionally. "Reunite with her? No, my uncles, she would only bring me untold misery." The uncles, who should have forced him to reunite, are helpless in the face of such conclusions.

That the narrator holds the upper hand is also reinforced by the confident, self-assured, almost complacent manner in which he narrates the story, apart from how he treats the audience's comments, remarks, questions and harangues. He orders them to "pass the calabash" at convenient points in his narrative. He breaks off the narration to eulogize the beer: "Ah, good beer this," or "This really is good beer." He has the worldly wise manner of someone who knows more than his auditors. For example, expressing surprise that they do not know what a correspondence course is, or what town life is like:

In town, my uncles, it means a lot to be seen with a parcel with the label P.T.C. on it. It is difficult to explain. It means you are somebody.

In other words it means he is free to digress, extrapolate, interpolate, since it is his story, he is master of it and master of the situation. He emerges as an intrepid, cocksure, incorrigible, unrepentant alcoholic and wife-hater, whereas the "uncles," who should have helped if not forced him to lead a better life, recede into the background as ignorant old village dodderers who also enjoy a good beer.

The above analysis demonstrates what Lipenga has done to liberate the modern short story to incorporate elements

of oral narrative performance. The results are fascinating studies of the genre. Some of the devices have also been used in the next story, "Sadaka," discussed below.

'Sadaka'

'Sadaka' finds the people of Kumbikumbi at the graveyard to commemorate the death of Nabetha, who died while her husband was supposedly away in the South African mines. As it turns out, however, Tumbuwa, the husband, had returned from the mines, had met his wife working in a bar in town as a prostitute, and had been so disappointed that he left her everything he had and turned to begging. This the reader and the audience learn as Tumbuwa turns up at the graveyard to join his fellows in mourning for his wife.

'Sadaka' is half-way between a conventional and an experimental story. It is conventional, since it starts like an ordinary first person narrative, placing the named characters firmly in the concrete setting of the graveyard. The narrator develops the story as through dialogue and narration Nabetha's story is pieced together from rumours about her and her husband to the present time. It starts turning experimental when Tumbuwa appears on the scene to supply the missing information about himself and his wife's activities in town. Tumbuwa becomes the second narrator within this already first person narration.

Tumbuwa's narrative takes the audience to the mines and back. It is interspersed with the first narrator's further description of the scene, comments, and dialogue with the second narrator. With the appearance of the second narrator, then, the story develops by self-revelation, commentary, and direct questioning.

'Waiting for a Turn'

'Waiting for a Turn' is set in an unnamed town and on a named mountain peak where the narrator, who is the main character, goes to end his life after his business has failed. Apart from the dreamlike quality of the story, especially towards the end, and the use of the hunchback as a magic helper, or the setting on the spirit-ridden mountain, the story is the most folkloric and carefully constructed story. Unlike 'Pass the Calabash' and parts of 'Sadaka,' the story

does not depend on an implied participating audience. Only once does the narrator address the reader directly: "And here I must give you a little more detail." The rest of the story depends on other devices for achieving its remarkable effects.

'Waiting for a Turn' is divided into three movements. The first movement introduces us to the narrator at the height of his success, and the subsequent downward trend when his business fails due to his mistreatment of his hunchback tailor. The second movement finds the narrator at the peak of the mountain, just about to leap into the abyss to end his life, then the subsequent backward movement when he is told he has jumped the queue, back to the end of the queue, where he has to wait for his turn. The last movement sees the narrator at the end of the queue slowly making his way up the line till his turn comes to be at the top. As can be seen, the first two movements parallel each other, from top to bottom, while the third one is structured to start the reverse process from bottom to top.

There is parallelism not only at the level of the three movements. It also occurs at plot level. Incidents occurring in the new tailoring shop and characters mirror each other; what happens to the hunchback's wife and family also happens to the narrator's wife and family. The setting seems to work on the principle of "as below, so above," as far as the narrator is concerned. Thematically also, the narrator's disillusionment with life confronts him on the peak. In this way, Lipenga produces a most carefully knit and unified story.

The parallel structures, plot, characters, etc., are supplemented stylistically by a pattern of verbal repetitions and variations producing a rhythm of the most intricate kind. There is, for example, lexical repetition in which the same word or phrase is repeated:

It was a still, multi-coloured thread which disappeared into the distance on both sides, a silent river made of faces, black faces, brown faces, white faces, yellow faces, young faces, old faces, middle-aged faces, rich and poor faces looking bored, grim faces of businessmen and beggars, faces of red-eyed prostitutes and professors, faces of bus-drivers, faces

of drunken old women, faces of banana-sellers, faces of international politicians, faces of spear-brandishing warriors, faces of mourning mothers side by side with faces of pilots of bomber planes, faces of convicted thieves, tired faces, happy faces, angry faces, frightened faces, faces, faces, faces, faces; faces of all kinds, standing still in that endless line.

Lexical repetition of individual words builds up to phrase level, to clause level, and to syntactic parallelism. Even whole paragraphs appear with slight modifications at crucial points in the different sections. Consider the opening refrain:

All roads lead to Sapitwa. All traffic moves towards Sapitwa. Rivers criss-cross and point in different directions. But all rivers flow into Sapitwa pool. Tears of laughter and tears of sorrow flow into Sapitwa pool. All enemies meet and shake hands at Sapitwa.

The above opens the first movement. The reader meets it again in a more extended form towards the end of the second movement.

As the above has revealed, from the word level up to the largest structural division the architecture of 'Waiting for a Turn' is so constructed as to form an intricate pattern of rhythm answering Forester's description.

'At the Graveyard'

The "shreds and tatters" of this paper's title come from the mouth of one of the characters in 'At the Graveyard,' a story that is so fragmented that it would not have read like a story at all had it not been for the same central unifying rhythmic device under discussion. The story is set around a graveyard with six grave-diggers preparing a fresh grave. Apart from the opening two paragraphs and one or two other paragraphs which describe the setting and on-going events, the story is all in dialogue form. Furthermore, although the story is told in the first person, it is the plural ("we," "us") i.e., the choral ensemble, that predominates as each of the six characters "tells his own story" as it were. All in all, there are six fragmented narratives, if we take each grave-digger as a narrator. However, the story can be said

to be really two legitimate stories in one, only that they have been so eroded that the reader is left with only the shreds and tatters to piece together.

The larger story, 'At the Graveyard,' i.e., Lipenga's story as told by his first narrator, concerns the grave-diggers as they dig a fresh grave for Mwanapiye, the rich man of Kumbikumbi who has just died. Through dialogue, we learn a great deal about the diggers, their relationships, the dead man and the circumstances of his death. We also learn about the progress of their labour: impatience at the bluntness of the hoes, the difficulty in digging, the fact that they had to start afresh several times since the previous times they kept meeting rocks; the turn-taking; the remarks the diggers make about themselves, each other, the dead man, the rumours, scandals, gossip of the people and village of Kumbikumbi; the impatience with the delay in bringing the body; the anxiety over whether or not they would be suitably paid for their labours. The only change of activity is when they take turns, stop to smoke or take snuff, sing, change hoes, sit to rest or listen to birds singing, inspect the depth reached, or look at a digger who has fallen asleep on the job in the pit. Throughout, since the story is all in dialogue form, the "narrators" comment on the scene so that reader is kept abreast of the ongoing events.

The second story is told by Mbeza in between the comments, complaints, anxieties, quarrels, singing, etc., of the rest of the characters. In sum, Mbeza's story is about "Kajosolo, the rich man of Chigumukire." Kajosolo, it transpired, not being satisfied with his riches, resorted to medicine and magic. The medicine man gave him potions, including worms to be killed ritually on an anthill in his own garden. It turned out that for each worm killed, one of his own children died at home. By the time news of the deaths reached Kajosolo, only his wife and mother were left alive (i.e., two worms). He panicked and discontinued the killing of the worms. However, since he had not completed the task, he could not get off the anthill to attend the funerals. Each time he tried to get off, he turned into a beast and his own people ran away from him. Rather than complete the deaths, he stayed on the anthill and his garden turned into a jungle eventually through disuse. No one knew Kajosolo's fate in the end.

Mbeza's story, "Kajosolo, the rich man of Chigumukire," is an ironic commentary on Mwanapiye, the rich man of Kumbikumbi, whose grave the six men are digging. Through the story, the reader is made to feel that Mwanapiye's riches, like Kajosolo's, were obtained through foul means. Through the comments made, too, we are led not to sympathize with the deceased. Both the stories and the comments, jokes, rumours, scandals are in ironic contrast with the setting. The reader's responses are manipulated by the realization that the setting is at odds with the jokes, sarcasm, antics, and leg-pulling or comedy being enacted by the characters around the graveyard. The stories come to an end when the coffin, the coffin bearers, the bereaved, and mourners arrive on the scene. The focus is, however, not on on-going events but on how the characters comment on them as the discussion below demonstrates.

If the other stories, 'Pass the Calabash,' 'Sadaka,' and 'Waiting for a Turn,' were one-man performances (i.e., with a single narrator), in "At the Graveyard," we have several characters taking turns to tell parts of the story, creating the effect of stories-within-stories, anecdotes-within-anecdotes, punctuated periodically by "we all laughed heartily" which performs the function of "tiri tonse" ("we are together") in this story. Within each unit there are several kinds of interruptions or interventions.

The most obvious ones are on-going conversations which are sandwiched in and around Mbeza's story as characters

(a) speculate or comment about funerals in general:

"I wonder how much you pay to have hymns sung at your funeral."

"Nothing."

and the ensuing reactions to:

"I'd like hymns to be sung at my funeral."

"How can that be? You're not a Christian."

"Sh. I'll join next year."

"Pastor Kabudula won't let you: you've committed too many sins."

(b) complain about grave-digging:

"Whoever started the idea of having graves dug by adzukulu ... digging graves for the dead."

"our ancestors."

(c) envy the inheritors of the dead man's wealth:

"I wish I were Mwanapiye's nephew ... All that wealth!"

"Thumbalamowa is old Mwanapiye's nephew, not so?"

"Your uncle? It can't be, otherwise you'd not be with us here. You'd be lying under one of those mounds."

(d) comment on the deceased:

"The rich man of Kumbikumbi ... was not well liked by everyone, ha ha ha."

(e) request that something be done by another member:

"Give me that chingambwe, Chikwaiti."

(f) interrupt Mbeza's other activities and engage him in conversation:

"Spare me some Chigumukire snuff, Mbeza."

"You'll finish my snuff, you people. Why don't you buy your own at the market?"

"If you give us the money, Mbeza."

(g) comment on other events in the setting:

When a bird shits in Chikwaiti's mouth:

"That's for laughing at me."

(h) make references to what has gone on or been said earlier:

"Did you say we could be given beer after this?"

"I can't see how if old Mwanapiye was a Christian."

(i) echo authorial description:

"You're sitting on top of a grave?"

"So?"

"It's not good for your children."

(j) sing:

"Nyenje itaimba imba."

(k) sleep through it and talk in one's sleep:

Ndasalapati sprang to his feet.

"The calabash. The calabash! Where am I? who am I?"

(l) dissuade others from encouraging the narrator:

"Are you asking him to start the story all over again?"

In between these activities, Mbeza tells his story of Kajosolo. Not everyone wants to hear the story. Apart from singing or engaging the narrator in irrelevant conversation, others discourage him by reminding him of the purpose for the gathering: "I say, Mbeza, remember old Mwanapiye died only yesterday," therefore he should not tell a story calumniates his name. Others shut him up: "Sh, him and his stories." Still others, who tolerate the story, object to the content: "Sh, you stop saying grim things."

Mbeza has a difficult task to tell his story in the face of the opposition. He adopts several strategies:

(a) defends the veracity of his story: "This one is true, I tell you."

(b) defends the veracity of details (demanded by the audience) in the story: "He died alright."

- (c) defends his right or safety in telling the story in this setting since the events happened elsewhere.
- (d) explains: "I mean he was a man. You see, each time he descended the people ran away."
- (e) breaks the flow of the text to answer questions: "Well, at first no one knew ... That's just it."
- (f) repeats details because:
 - (1) the audience has not heard: "Yes, worms, five of them."
 - (2) the audience does not believe: "In the absence of their rich father."
 - (3) he thinks he has given the information already but in fact has not: "Just a small fragment, I said."
 - (4) he does not know the details: "Oh, I don't know much. I hear the fellow ... But then no one knows for sure."
 - (5) he has lost track of what he has told them: "How? Ah! I forgot I had told you."
 - (6) he gets involved in on-going activities: "I've been in there before" (i.e., refusing to take his turn in digging).
- (g) is conscious of telling a story: "I'm telling a storriiitye!"
- (h) loses his temper at the interruptions: "If you'll all shut up and listen ... You're not listening. You've engaged your ears to unimportant things."
- (i) loses patience with the audience's slow understanding:

"It was nothing to him. Haven't I said that he had countless chickens?"

"How can they when they're dead?"
- (j) gets angry at proddings: "That's just what I'm getting to. Don't push me."

(k) quarrels over parts:

"What are you laughing at?"

"I was just thinking about the beauty of your wife."

"I'll bash your head in for you."

In spite of all the stresses they place on the narrator, some of the listeners are sympathetic and do want to hear the story. The audience prompts Mbeza in the following ways:

- (a) direct encouragement: "Well, Mbeza, go on with the story, what are you waiting for?"
- (b) direct agreement to shut up and listen: "Everyone shut their mouths and listen."
- (c) restraining others: "Don't rush him."
- (d) discouraging irrelevant singing: "I don't see the point of that song."
- (e) reminding Mbeza to continue from where he had left off: "So this fellow had medicine which could make people work in your garden in their sleep? Without their knowing it?" "What happened in the end?"
- (f) impatience with the way the story is told: "We already know that ... You haven't told us, but we know all the same."
- (g) requesting missing details: "Had he no name, this rich man of yours?"
- (h) noting familiarity with the story: "Now I think I know who you're talking about."
- (i) asking for explanations: "How was that? ... People! How can a man work in his sleep?"
- (j) feigning ignorance: "Who's Kajosolo now?"
- (k) requesting verification: "Somebody is lying ... Now wait. Did you say this actually happened?"

(l) disagreeing with parts: "Did Mangazi give Kajosolo the medicine? ... What was it like? ... An elephant's tusk around his waist? Have you seen an elephant, you?"

(m) commenting on parts:

"So poor Kajosolo had to lose five chickens?"

"Five chickens for happiness? That's quite cheap."

(n) interjections: "Oh, terrible business."

(o) offering suggestions on a course of action which should have been taken: "They should have consulted Mangazi."

(p) interpreting or giving plausible explanations to obscure parts of the story: "It means the man didn't die, that's all."

(q) relating parts to their own experience:

"I think someone in this village makes me work in his garden at night."

"(Wife) Can't have been more beautiful than mine."

(r) introjecting:

"What would you do if it were you?"

"I don't know. Don't ask me."

Apart from the interruptions coming from the audience due to the manner of narration, or to the on-going activities or, for the reader, because he is reading a fragmented story-within-another fragmented story, the pattern of repetitions is complex. The regular "We all laughed heartily" functioning as "we are together" has already been mentioned. This alone occurs eight times. The story is also punctuated by a time-keeper who comes in periodically to ask the question initially "When are they bringing in the coffin?" which changes to the admonitory "Sh, I hear wailing. I think the funeral procession's coming" which in turn changes to "Sh, here they come with the coffin" to the final "Sh, stop, they've arrived." The time-keeper comes in six times in all. Mbeza's own

Kajosolo story is punctuated eight times with "Sh, him and his stories." And in place of the usual folk song, there is the unexpected breaking out into song of one of the characters: "Nyenje itayimbayimba." At one point a whole stanza is sung.

The above are only some of the one or two sentence repetitions coming at crucial points in the story. There are, however, several times in which whole conversations between two or more characters are repeated. Take for example the following:

"Maine! I've hit a rock," said Ndasalapati.

"Again?" Mkwatawamba exclaimed. "It's a bad omen."

"Old Mwanapiye doesn't want to go."

The conversation is repeated verbatim three times at different stages of the story's progress. Other discourse level repetitions concern turn-taking, one of the characters' wish to dig a white man's grave, or the bluntness of the hoe, or the hardness of the earth, or whether or not they have dug deep enough. These discourse level repetitions complement the word, phrase, and clause level repetitions below them and the sections or units above them in the same way the two longer stories supplement one another.

What we have in 'At the Graveyard' is a full version of what happens at the fireside when a narrator announces and goes ahead to tell a story: the story proper and the events surrounding the performance. The only difference is not the obvious change of setting but the orchestration of several strands narrated by different performers supplementing, complementing, or threatening to destroy the main narrative or narratives.

Lipenga's Contribution

The notion of "shreds and tatters" is in keeping with the Kumbikumbi stories since gossip, rumour, anecdote, tale, or myth, the sources of Lipenga's inspiration, have come to depend on fragments or snippets of larger and sometimes untraceable or irretrievable wholes. Some of the stories are partial experiments. For example, 'Sadaka' belongs to the early stages of experimentation. Other stories dispense

with some of the techniques developed and which were even successful in earlier ones. 'Waiting for a Turn' stands out as entirely dependent on the narrator's verbal repetitions and not as in 'At the Graveyard' (to a greater extent than 'Pass the Calabash') on the audience's contributions.

If rhythm is the stylistic device the stories depend so much on then what we have here is a series of carefully structured stories balanced on an architecture that in less able hands would be liable to collapse. The less developed stories like 'Sadaka' depend partially on conventional story telling technique. The more accomplished, structurally that is, 'At the Graveyard,' is a demonstration of how the author can hold verbal rhythmic devices at the same time, woven and interwoven, coming and going, at different times and levels, to come close to Forster's "difficult" rhythm. However, if we use Forster's "easy" and "difficult" rhythms as evaluative devices, it is the "easy" rhythm that Lipenga is using: he does not attempt the difficult "symphonic" rhythm.¹⁷ 'At the Graveyard,' to some readers who are not aware of what the author is attempting, would be dismissed as "cacophonous." Taken together as a whole, though, the stories constitute one of the greatest African experiments ever carried out in this genre. It is a great pity that Lipenga appears to have stopped such experiments after the publication of **Waiting for a Turn**.

NOTES

1. E.M. Forster, **Aspects of the Novel** (London: Penguin, 1927); pp. 151-170.
2. Forster, **Aspects of the Novel**, pp. 167-168.
3. Forster, **Aspects of the Novel**, p. 169.
4. Forster, **Aspects of the Novel**, p. 170.
5. Ken Lipenga, **Waiting for a Turn** (Limbe, Malawi: Popular Publications, 1981).
6. Lipenga, **Waiting for a Turn**, p. 37.
7. Forster, **Aspects of the Novel**, p. 166.

8. Steve Chimombo, "A Model of Oral Narrative Performance," manuscript, 1978. See also Enoch Timpunza Mvula, "Chewa Folk Narrative Performance," paper presented at the Seventh Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, 12-18 August 1979, Edinburgh, Scotland.
9. Robert A. Georges, "Toward an Understanding of Story-Telling Events," **Journal of American Folklore**, 82 (1969), 313-328.
10. Robert A. Georges, "Feedback and Response in Story-Telling," **Western Folklore**, 38, 2 (April 1979), 104-110.
11. The following is a summary of Chimombo, "A Model of Oral Narrative Performance."
12. Lipenga, **Waiting for a Turn**, pp. 14-19.
13. Lipenga, **Waiting for a Turn**, pp. 26-37.
14. Lipenga, **Waiting for a Turn**, pp. 118-122.
15. Lipenga, **Waiting for a Turn**, pp. 93-101.
16. An obvious exclusion from this group is "The Drunkard of Kumbikumbi," pp. 38-57. It has been left out because it is not one of the experimental set of stories under discussion here.
17. Forster, **Aspects of the Novel**, pp. 165-167.