

Moments of rewriting

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Rewriting and interpretation

“What [...] is there that a novelist can say about his work that wouldn’t be left to the critics?” (Ellison 1980: vii). This question leads to another of whether the critic has the authority to say everything about the novel and that the author should be silent. Who has more authority over the text between the author and the critic/reader? Again, who has more authority on the meaning of the text between the two?

This essay opens with the question of the authority of the author¹ vis-à-vis that of the reader/critic when they meet on a seemingly apolitical space we call the text. Our first view is that the text is a political space, and indeed a much-politicised one, where some form of power is made or unmade. That is why an author may feel alienated from his work with the popular view that once published, the work no longer belongs; all that is left is an endless feast of interpretations. As such, an author could be as grateful as to declare, “It is fortunate that some writers are given an opportunity to respond to their critics[,] otherwise they would die mutely at the mercy of hostile and misguided responses” (Chimombo 2005: 114, emphasis mine). Thus, the critic is viewed as having the power to make or kill the writer.

But problems arise upon sanctioning the novelist as a critiquing authority over or speaking about his own work as this can be viewed as primarily allowing him to trespass the shrine of the literary critic. The literary critic, mostly employed as an academic, finds bread and salt in claiming an authoritative position that holds the author in what Michel Foucault describes below as a panoptic space. For Chimombo (2005:114), Malawian critics on his works have become the panopticon, just like the Big Brother found in George Orwell’s *1984*, hiding in “the one-way surveillance architectural structure to enable warders to watch prison inmates without themselves being observed”. The critic and the author seem to view each other from the polarised positions where,

all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (mad/sane;

dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal); and that of coercive assignment, of differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is characterized; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be exercised over him in an individual way, etc.) (Foucault 1995: 199).

There are indeed instances when each views his position as *thetic*, normative and an authority of “correct” interpretation of the text. As Chimombo has implied, the critic can as well be perceived to be dangerous while the author is simply not trusted to speak (truth) about his own work. This is a power tussle between the constructed binary of the author and critic. The two have learnt to watch each other carefully through a panoptical space as though to curb each other. Panopticism, after all, is a “technique through which disciplinary power is able to function” and it relies on surveillance (McHoul & Grace 2002: 7).

Allowing an author to speak about his own work has become a violation of the author-critic socially constructed binarism. In essence, the author cannot be allowed to co-exist with the critic in the same individual. It is simply unimaginable one to write a novel and turn round to publish an academic critique of the same in a journal. The publisher would probably be the first to vindicate Foucault by branding “the scholar” *insane*.

Authors on the hand may view themselves as holding a more legitimate authority over *the correct interpretation* of their work and that every reading falling outside that becomes a *misinterpretation*. That must be the underlying assumption when Wole Soyinka cautions his interpreters against “perverse mentality” that leads to *misinterpretations* of reducing his play to “a clash of cultures”. Proceeding to prescribe how the play should be produced, and therefore how it should be interpreted, he finally declares authoritatively, “No attempt should be made to suggest [otherwise].”² This is a moment of setting records correct for the writer, a moment of rewriting his work so that its producers and readers must understand the work *correctly* and *differently* from wrong readings. This authoritative “Author’s Note” then becomes part of the text because it is meant to be a supplement, an insertion to the meaning and yet; it is a form of authorial criticism of the text at the same time. Here is self-criticism coming through the authorial supplement. Is self-criticism a scandal indeed?

Femi Abodunrin’s *The Dancing Masquerade* is one literary work that consciously interspaces the narrative with authorial supplements. It is one of the

most conscious intertextual novels, of course not to the level of W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* or *Austerlitz*. Abodunrin's supplement texts, which are in form of polemical and theoretical fragments, are quoted and inserted in between the chapters. They are meant to bridge the narrative from one stage to another. But they also mostly make general critical comments over and above the entire story. An example of a general theoretical insertion goes:

Cultural experience or indeed every cultural form is radically, quintessentially hybrid, and if it has been the practice in the West since Emmanuel Kant to isolate cultural and aesthetic realms from the worldly domain, it is now time to join them.³

To put it conveniently, this is Edward Said speaking in *Culture and Imperialism* although one can hear echoes of Homi Bhabha and Emmanuel Kant in the same voice. But upon reading Said into the story, the voice becomes that of the narrator of the story. Then, it becomes the author speaking within the entirety of the novel and the subject matter at hand. Eventually, it becomes Femi Abodunrin speaking about "culture and imperialism" together with others such as Chinua Achebe and Ulli Beier in the entirety of the novel. The three, together with 'the word of their fathers' as it comes from the wisdom of prior vernacular texts such as proverbs, write one novel but with different voices.⁴ Abodunrin's voice is to be appreciated in such a dialogical context. *The Dancing Masquerade* enters into communion, a conversation with other Postcolonial voices and is better appreciated in the dialogic context of the postcolony as a cultural space. After all, intertextuality is not merely about "a work's relation to particular prior texts" but more about "its participation in the discursive space of culture" (Culler 1981: 103). It is thus possible to understand Abodunrin in that broader conversational or dialogic context also because we have allowed Edward Said, who is further in/formed by Kant and Bhabha, to in/form part of *The Dancing Masquerade*.

Borders of the text

Where does the text begin and end then? Michel Foucault (1972:23) would argue in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that,

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration 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.

Can we indeed judge a book without its covers even if it has been critically autographed in epigraph, epigram, prologue or afterword? The suggestion here is that these are sites where the author is allowed to speak about his text. They form a supplement and therefore an extended part of the text. Since our reading of such supplements 'prejudices' or simply affects our reading of the so-called 'text proper', the supplements ultimately present the reader with the (untotalisable) totality of text that has been written differently, that is, rewritten.

One could indeed argue that the act of prohibiting the author from speaking is the intent of capitalism. Capitalism relishes in advocating divisions of labour and jealously policing the boundaries. It relishes in labelling us so that we must belong to particular shelves. It is as if even academics *sell* better on their disciplinary shelves and gone are the European Renaissance days when one could be a scientist, poet, politician, scholar and otherwise without becoming a Capitalist scandal. Today, we are all forbidden from speaking our truth in a Court of Law because there has emerged the professional called the lawyer who must speak on our behalf if he must make a living. Likewise, the author must not speak; it is an anathema. Although, the author seems to have been forbidden from explicitly becoming a critic for some centuries, this division of labour can be aptly contextualised within the spirit of Capitalism.

The production and consumption of the text is seen as less and less communal; more and more individualised such that "who speaks" sometimes matters more than "what they say". The authority is attached to the speaker prior to the moment of speaking. Today, since the overwhelming commodification of our African writers the capitalist midwives called publishers (and their academics), Achebe or Ngugi will be listened to more avidly than some other Amarala Aliman whom we have never heard of. The communal production and consumption of narratives pervasive in oral cultures is perceived to have vanished. This is partly a complete delusion though. While this 'vanishing' is

only a falsification of the genesis of the text made by Capitalism as this essay intends to argue below, the attempted individualisation of the text has also ushered in the “false” autonomy of the text and its interpretation.

Interpretation has been understood as an analysis of an autonomous work “in and for itself, without reference to possible external contexts, whether biographical, historical, psychoanalytic, or sociological” (Culler 1981:103). But then, reading is thrown “Beyond Interpretation” because the “Commitment to the autonomy of the literary text ... [which] led to interpretation as the proper activity of criticism” (Culler 1981:103) is hereby undermined. The author has revealed an absence, a lack within the supposed autonomy of his own text by desiring a supplement. The New Critical thrust advocated by literary interpreters of such orientation is also far less helpful if taken as *the* approach to reading and teaching Postcolonial African writers who were essentially made to write the way they do in response to an onslaught of the same historical, psychoanalytic, socio-cultural and political forces. The external con/texts (for these could be ‘other cultures’ or texts) to which these writers may respond and rewrite would be necessarily read into or along with the text in order to understand an African Postcolonial writer. Such is the hallmark of the *dialogic imagination* of the African writer.

But to go beyond the fixation of New Criticism, we must first unfix the text and recognise that the writer’s voice matters and may remain part of, an addition to the con/text wherever it occurs just as we accept others’ voices into the text. It is the plurality of the author’s voice reckoned with. As such, “To interpret a text is not [just] to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it” (Barthes 1974: 5). One would suggest that this plurality goes back and forth, to prior texts (even of the same author), beyond and outside to discursive voices or responses of the author on the same work.

But the grateful Chimombo above is clearly aware that not all writers’ voices are easily accepted back into their texts in an opportunity to respond to their critics. Thus, they are not free to rewrite their own texts in such circumstances. To rewrite, after all, means *presenting* something or oneself with difference – so that it can be viewed differently as Soyinka has done in his “Note” on *Death and the King’s Horseman* above. Rewriting becomes (self) re-/presentation (Molande 2004: 42-44). Understandably, writers are hardly allowed to respond

and represent themselves essentially because they are declared long dead by the Capitalist Structuralist and are 'therefore' not supposed to be heard speaking back to the critic. The author is not supposed to be present, poking his nose into the business of authorities conducting a surgery of his work. Indeed, the author is dead only in that he is no longer the Origin, Source and Author claiming monopoly over truth, over what the text and its meaning must *become*. Indeed, "the true place of the writing ... is reading" as Barthes argues⁵ and because 'all writing is rewriting'. But then, what if the author comes back as a reader of his own work, to rewrite the work? Is he indeed as dead as wished? Is this not only a perpetuation of novelty or part of the very nature of novelty?

The infinite space of novelty

If Mikhail Bakhtin is one to take our cue from, we will also insist that the novelist has an infinite, endless word on his work because "the novel precisely [is] a genre in the making". It is an indeterminate "living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality" (Bakhtin 1981a: 11, 7). The novel was never closed. Indeed, from *Things Fall Apart* to *Anthills of the Savannah*, Chinua Achebe's works can be viewed as one continuously evolving novel that speaks different voices in different con/texts in the unfolding reality of Africa in the aftermath of colonialism. Once asked, "Do you see *Anthills* as being more related to your previous novels or to your other post-war writings?" Achebe's response is cast as follows:

I think they are all related. What I am trying to do is look at the story of Africa in the modern world, looking at it from different angles, according to what is happening at the time, according to what I have just been through, [...] or even to be different from the way I looked at it previously [...] I think they all come from the same concern, *to tell as complete a story as possible* (Wilkinson 1992: 50, emphasis mine).

A *complete* story would be one that is closed and that would entail the death of writing, death of the novel. Achebe can only consciously wish for a story that moves towards an (ideal) completion, that is, "as complete a story as possible". But the wish towards organic unity of 'a complete story' that Achebe expresses here implies that 'all' his works are in a sense one unfolding 'novel'. The Achebean novel is typical of novelty in the making. Achebe's canon however still remains heterogeneous, which the Mikhail Bakhtin of *The Dialogic Imagination* would account for in terms of its heteroglotic nature arising from Achebe's own emphasis on the primacy of contexts or 'places' from which one sees the world. For Bakhtin, heteroglossia is "the base condition governing the

operation on meaning” and this condition being “the primacy of context over text” (Bakhtin 1981a: 428) thereby freeing the text to speak different voices varying with contexts.

Every ‘new’ work can start from and contain a comment on the previous text. Of course, sometimes a writer may protest that “There are no direct or indirect references to the earlier poems. It belongs to a different period altogether” (Chimombo 2005:114). But it is easier to argue that way than to be aware of the subconscious process of the human psyche which functions like a magnetic field repelling, attracting and fusing prior texts. Writers differ in their artistic (social) mission of course. Not all writers consciously plan to narrate an evolving but ‘complete story’ or a comprehensive statement, despite being heteroglotic, about a human situation. The assumed nexus between one particular work and prior texts would also depend on whether a writer has a consistent standpoint to an unfolding novelistic reality or not.

All in all, the writer still needs to be read and understood as a whole canon wherever practically possible. For example, the recurring presence of the “Black Messiah” in Ngugi wa Thiong’o from *The River Between* to *Matigari* is a clear nexus demanding us to conclude that every novel has been a tacit or unconscious rewriting of the former. Ngugi accepts the unconscious process of rewriting in the following interview:

[Q] Reading *Matigari* I kept thinking back to some of your previous work. It seemed almost as if you were voluntarily recalling characters, incidents and themes that had appeared before. Was that a conscious strategy?

[A] No, I was not aware of that. I suppose you’re right in the sense that there’s an attempt at summing up experiences arising from previous attempts. But then in *every writer’s work there are echoes of previous literary texts* (Wilkinson 1992: 133, emphasis mine).

Thus, even a single author’s writing needs to be understood within the notion of *intertextuality* in which texts echo each other because each text is in/formed by fragments or genes of prior texts – either oral or written. This is what also leads to the open-endedness of novelty. The texts are speaking to one another and rewriting each other in what Bakhtin (1981a) characterises as a dialogic process, if simply not “dialogic imagination”. Thus, a writer’s own ‘new’ may come into birth out of his ‘reading’ of or ‘listening’ to his other works because

no dialogic process is conceivable without reciprocal listening, or at least a listening to a prior speech act. This dialogic activity lies in the very genesis of intertextuality.

Bearing in mind that intertextuality is the naissance of re/writing and implies an endless novelty that ever-accompanies any literary text (Molande 2004:51), this essay proceeds by critically recounting the moments of rewriting in a bid to re-examine the authority of the author.

In-between the binaries

There is however one literary discourse that transgresses the boundary between the author and the critic. The literary interview is a discourse that occupies the borderland between the author and the critic thereby falsifying the hitherto constructed boundary. The interview of the author is a moment of rewriting in which the writer becomes the critic and learner of his own work. Anne Koenen's interview with Toni Morrison (1974:77) reveals some of such instances.

K: I think in what you have described about your sexual scenes in your books, you've described how a feminine – as opposed to general masculine – way of writing about sex could be like.

M: I think that's probably true.

Toni Morrison seems to be discovering something new and learning it from her reader who has been interviewing her. Morrison is not a goddess possessing every secret and answer about her own work. At another point, Morrison is asked why she portrays Eva and Pilate the way she does and her initial response is, "Well, I don't really know" (ibid: 78). The interview is a moment that uncovers the crack between the author and the reader. It reveals the limits of the power of the author when he becomes a learner of his own work. The author becomes finite before his own work.

The interview is indeed a dialogic moment that falsifies the sometimes-assumed godliness of the author. Part of this de-authorisation can be seen in Foucault's (1986:352-53) "What is an Author" where,

the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill the work, the author does not precode the works, he is a certain functional principle ... the author is an ideological product The author is an

ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.

It is significant to note that the reader is also “an ideological product” much more like the author. This clearly explains why an American critic and an African intellectual would read the culture in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* differently when the novel was first published. Where the former could see the novel as an anthropological confirmation of the primitive man in the *Heart of Darkness*, the latter would see the dignity of African humanity within its complex (but noble) culture. The two readers were products of different ideological orientations.

But Roland Barthes also implies that the individual whom we called the author does not have all the *a priori* the power to make meaning and the text authoritative. He is not an author because he is initially and automatically authoritative by virtue of creatively putting together the fragment tissues of thought into a narrative. What is more even precise in Foucauldian thought is that Western society has made the writer the author, or that the authority of the writer is a social construction.

The literary interview is a discourse that overthrows the myth of the sanctity of (intended) meaning and its author or source. Beginning with the many occasions when the author rejects or confirms a reading of the interviewer, the sanctity and origin of meaning is questioned. The author’s responses still haunt us with the question of whether he has such authority as to sanction any reading as “correct” or “wrong”. But to what extent? The denial of a reading suggests the author has the authority to declare a reading as a misinterpretation. The assumption that the author is the only speaker in a text cannot stand either.

The interview is also a dialogic moment and an instance of epiphany when we hear the author exclaiming, “Oh, thank you for your comments. I have discovered so many things I didn’t even know... [about my own work]”.⁶ This moment of the writer’s discovery of a work of his own creation raises critical questions.

Why should the meaning, which the reader comes forth with, be *new* to the author of the work? It would appear that the reader writes his own text during the moment of reading. Another writer reveals, “I have talked to many readers

of my novels and discovered that they didn't read the book I wrote".⁷ The readers then read a different book, their own book. It is 'a second', though not necessarily 'secondary', book which the reader writes in the moment of reading. Therefore, reading is an event of rewriting. This 'too' is revealed when readers (who also become *other* authors) meet authors.

The given assumption is that the interviewer who does the asking comes to learn from the author – who in turn learns from the reader. However, the interview is a rare opportunity when authors are officially offered the legitimacy to read, explain, critique and evaluate their own works. The interview is a discourse that becomes the author's supplement to the text. Remembering "the supplement" in Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, we can argue that the interview is an 'insertion' pushing through in between the author and the interviewer-cum-reader for the birth of a new writing. At that moment when the reader and the writer are learning from each other about the meaning of the text, the boundary between the two becomes undecidable whereas their authority over meaning and the tacit monopoly for 'truth' are undermined. At most, the interview is a moment of rewriting.

Beginnings of the text

Rewriting is the issuing forth a new text. But one more question is whether rewriting should be understood as any changing of the pristine primal text into the secondary position. Is there any single text that can be posited in the origin, in the beginnings? Is there such a thing as an original text? To assume any text as original would imply that it has no precursors and the theory of Intertextuality which accounts for the birth of the text would refute such a claim. This theory posits that every text is 'genetically' in/formed and its newness, uniqueness as well as individuality arise amid old, sometimes banal and familiar tissues. The 'genes' that in/form the new text come from other prior texts without assuming them to be an *a priori* (See Molande 2005). Thinking of a text as an "original" assumes the text to be the Word with "greatest possible concentration of presence" (Selden et al 1997: 171) as though it were an authority that *was* with God in the beginning.⁸ Such a text would be self-referential. It would be the centre.

The author of *the source text* would then be another "I Am Who I Am" – fully present and self-referential, thereby usurping the position of God, the Origin, and the Author. In that case, the author of the text would be viewed as having invested 'original' meaning too sacred to be misread. But understanding

rewriting as a continuous process that has no authoritative beginnings with any single human overthrows what Pierre Macherey (1995:2) describes as “the myth that literature is filled with a meaning-content that has only to be grasped or unveiled for it to blossom.” It is the myth that the text contains the prior or “primal truth” before the reader and that its meaning must, therefore, be treated as sacrosanct.

There are indeed no prior texts that can be treated as the ‘primal truth’ because such a text must have come from elsewhere. All writing is a form of rewriting thereby making it highly complex, if possible, to place a finger at the origin at which the actual writing of a single text begins. As Jonathan Culler (1981:103) argues, the prior texts have since lost their origins. Beginnings in writing can only be mythical especially as actual writing will have taken place mentally for a long time by the time the thoughts are coded and manifest on paper. It is in that long psychic process or the gestation period where the text assumes its intertextual nature. The psychic process is the key moment of rewriting.

By the time the text is born on paper, it is already social because it arises from a moment of conversation with other texts. When Bakhtin observes that “verbal discourse is a social phenomenon” in its entirety (Bakhtin 1981a:259), it is critical to remember that it is because “language is ‘dialogic’” therefore basically social (Newton 1988: 22). Thus, the language of the text is already in an imaginational social intercourse. After all, even thought is at best internally social in its nature.

Unlikely moments of rewriting

It would be less contestable to posit that the oral text is more social than the so-called written literature. The oral text is either born or modified (‘edited’) by way of improvisation. The process of improvisation in oral compositions is a moment of rewriting. We sometimes improvise a narrative or song from fragments scattered across memory that we collectively add to our own words to make *the new*. But today, we might be made to believe that orality died with literacy, or the writing culture but it never did. The academic scepticism over whether there is anything called Oral Literature and whether the term does not contradict the essence of Literature⁹ signifies an overwriting of orality starting with the advent of a writing culture during the event of colonisation in places like Africa. Improvisation, which is a highly social event, still takes place in the in/forming of modern texts. Obviously, the individualisation of texts is a false

and capitalistic tendency that aims at labelling a trademark on the cultural commodity to benefit one single human when the text is placed on the bookshelves. Indeed, “There is the material individualisation of the book, which occupies a determined space which has an economic value” (Foucault 1969: 11). Our writing culture does not only individualise the social text but also materialise it as well. The name of the author then becomes a selling label.

However, even that which we consider to be the most individually owned text, the academic thesis is an improvised and social text written by many people. The supervisors are most obvious ‘other’ unacknowledged writers present in the process of the rewriting. Truly, the *viva voce* is a moment of rewriting at which the panel will in/form the ‘final’ product of the thesis.

Apart from the *viva voce*, a conference is another moment of improvisation of what would be considered as high discourse – research work that must be academically labelled. The moment of saying “Ah, oh! Thanks, I did not quite see that point in my reading” when responding to a comment or question during the conference is the very moment of improvisation. A conference is some sort of a carnival signifying a communal moment of rewriting. The refined research paper or book chapter coming out of that moment can at best only be fairly described as a social product. Such a text is born in a dialogue no matter how the author would want to claim to be an authority, how no matter authoritative the text is taken to be. Its authority is therefore undermined. In Bakhtin’s thinking of course, dialogue is “opposed to the ‘authoritarian word’ [...] in the same way as carnival is opposed to official culture. The ‘authoritarian word’ does not allow any other type of speech to approach and interfere with it” (Bakhtin 1984: x). Criticism sometimes assumes such an ‘authoritarian word’, and conflict immediately arises when we meet an author who views himself as *the* authority over his work.

Rewriting as resistance

An example of one the most authoritative word of the fathers is to be found in the Oxford-Cambridge academic snobbery. Jacques Derrida, the Algerian-born but French-appropriated philosopher provoked the spirit when he deconstructed Western systems of thought. He has become “the intruder” who “came from the margins”, “the chief bogeyman” leading “an insurrection against the clam philosophical and political certainties of the metropolis” (Young 2000: 187-93). Robert Young’s panoptic, omniscient voice speaking from Oxford – those relics of academic purity – is prevalent in such phrases as “I already knew what was

going on”; “I knew it all along”; “it was obvious to me what you were up to” and so forth (Young 2000:187-89). It is the criticism that forbids the Subaltern from speaking because the self-instituted fathers of knowledge are always saying, ‘we know it all, let us alone speak, we know you.’

The same condescension is what you find in O’Honlon and Washbrook’s attack (1991) when Gyan Prakash (1990) dared write a ‘post-orientalist history of the Third World’, his own story from a Marxist position. But how could such a Postcolonial Subaltern dare speak like a Marxist? He has been accused of riding two horses, and Prakash’s reply (1992) has been, “*let us hang on two horses, inconstantly*”; and respect the difference between Postcolonial and the metropolitan know-it-all academic. More recently, the ‘I-know-you, I-see-you’ panoptic spirit has resurfaced from the cupboards of Cambridge in the form of Harri Englund’s dismissal of Francis Moto’s gendered reading of indigenous literature. Englund (2004) has tried to demonstrate how well he knows Moto as an academic, a businessman and even political ‘interpreter’. Moto’s reading is said to have been dangerously impaired by ‘political expedience’. But the Cambridge don enters into theoretical quicksand misled by the irrelevant signposts of the personal and political assumptions. For example, Englund uses Moto’s *administrative position* of being Principal of Chancellor College to mislead reader that Moto is *therefore* a “gatekeeper” of opinions “of Malawian literature both inside and outside the country” (Englund 2004:155-56). How that works logically and practically, the Cambridge don should know better than us – after all, they know the African well. The omniscient patronage is even clearer when this Western scholar writes Moto a letter in impressing vernacular to make a point, ‘I know you, I even know the language you speak’.¹⁰ Englund’s tone of course escapes the outright academic heckling one finds in Robert Young. This angle and tone of criticism vitiates Englund’s credible analysis of Moto’s misreading of characters in Malawi’s indigenous literature. That is, while Englund has a valid case against Moto’s engendered reading, his political positioning with “the Word of the Fathers” misleads and undermines his dialogical engagement with the postcolonial text. Such fathers come from a culture that resists being rewritten. Otherwise, even cultures undergo moments of rewriting in their dialogical encounter with other cultures. No wonder, “The resisting Postcolonial has become a scandal” (Spivak in Young 2000: 191).

But such is the Word speaking from ‘above’ us – after all, did they not ‘father us’? Bakhtin places such a cosmogonic version of speech to ‘the high’, supposed to be the sacred and sacrosanct discourse, which he calls the authoritative word of the fathers.¹¹ In Bakhtin’s view, “Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is “a *prior* discourse” (Bakhtin 1981: 43) whose causative subject or speaker, invoked in Rene Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am”, co-existed with our academic beginnings, hence the ‘we-know-you’ attitude. It is assumed that we can only receive this word without question. But any counter-response becomes a resistance, a self-representation and, therefore, a moment of rewriting the Self. But the resistance is also a moment of rewriting such demeaning discourses.

There are many more moments of rewriting. Some moments have historically taken entire generations. The Caliban-like Postcolonial writers theorised in *The Empire Writes Back* have witnessed a moment of rewriting in ‘writing back to the centre’. Rewriting can, and does take the form of resistance in this case. Generations of female writers have been rewriting, or more to the point, castrating patriarchal discourse for some time now. Both colonial and patriarchal discourses are written from phallogocentric positions and any ‘writing back’ to these is also a ‘castrating’ process. The question of power cuts across Postcolonial and Feminist discourses.

A people’s resistance against any power is a form of rewriting history in that they intend to change the course of their destiny. But they are also (self) rewriting in that they are re-/presenting themselves differently. Indeed,

Any struggle for liberation announces to the oppressor, “that is neither the way you should view or treat us. See, we are different and thus treat us differently with all due respect!” The oppressed pro/claim difference because their struggle to assert themselves differently *on the stage of history*. [...The] people in the struggle are *manipulating a stage* in history.... They are re-writing (changing) history (Molande 2004:43).

That resistance is a moment of historical rewriting. It is not strange then that the authoritative author of postcolonial history can as well be resisted and de-authorised. Equally, the authority of what literature is calls for a rewriting, which will inevitably become complex with a writing and Capitalist culture which seems to have come to stay. It is perhaps similar complexities that make the author and the critic to resist each other but continue to “*hang on to two horses, inconstantly*” while the intertextual nature of the text also resists the

authority of its author. The author is de-authorised by the text but resists the type of reading that assumes a becoming the Word of the fathers against which the author has no say. Indeed, the authoritative author of meaning remains undecidable and there is no monopoly for 'truth' in between the author and the reader. In the moment of rewriting, the text is elusive and dispersed across society and time – it is born but not yet, conceived, mothered, fathered yet fatherless, motherless and yet waiting to be conceived.

Notes

1. I am aware of the theoretical problematics surrounding the definition of "the author" in relation to his "work" or "text" as the argument comes from Roland Barthes' and Michel Foucault's schools of thought. For now, the term "author" – used deliberately to echo "authority" might be accepted to be interchangeably used with "the writer" who for Barthes could simply be "the scriptor"
2. Wole Soyinka has made this protest in an "Author's Note", *Death and King's Horseman*, London: Eyre Methuen, 1975. The basic question here is the authority of the author over interpretation and meaning.
3. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, quoted in Femi Abodunrin, *The Dancing Masquerade*, Ibadar: Dokun Publishing House, 2003, p.41. Thus, a quotation is consciously used to in/form part of the novel.
4. See the use of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of 'heteroglossia' below in this essay.
5. See Roland Barthes (1998) p. 157. There is a scholar who believes that Barthes is celebrating the resurrection of the author. Also see J.C. Carlier (2000) pp. 386-393.
6. See Ken Lipenga in Bernth Lindfors, *Kulankhula: Interviews with Writers from Malawi and Lesotho*, Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies, Series No. 14, p. 16. While it might be argued that this "apparent" self-discovery is only a matter of courtesy, it remains true that an honest writer will be convinced with an entirely new reading of his work and learn of a meaning he never intend. The Writers Workshop at the University of Malawi where writers bring their works to be discussed in their presence while they mutely listen. In fact, this can be a humbling moment for the writer.
7. Sue Ellen Bridgers, an American writer addressing the Writers Workshop at the University of Malawi, Chancellor College, Zomba, 20 May 2005.

8. The most ultimate concentration of presence and authority is to be found in this declaration, "In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and the Word was God ... without [which/whom] was not anything made that was made."
9. It is remarkable to note that leading scholars such as Terry Eagleton and Raymond Williams have pegged both the concept and the term of "Literature" to the written as though this is the very essence and point of departure from which all definitions of Literature must start and end. This immediately forecloses African narratives that are only transmitted in an oral as opposed to written medium. But what is the essence of Literature? Is it the medium? See Eagleton (1996), and Williams (1977).
10. The letter invokes the meeting of the two and recounts the passage of time in-between. After briefing Moto of the article under discussion, Englund asks his addressee to not be too disappointed with his scholarly disagreement or point view and takes the teacher-position when he finally advises "*Tiyenera kukambirana ngakhale kuphunzitsana kuti zinthu ziyende bwino*" (We need to discuss or even teach each other if we are to go the right way). It needs to be added that Englund stayed in Malawi where he learnt Chichewa and 'knew' Moto.
11. See M.M. Bakhtin "Discourse in the Novel". For Bakhtin, both the high and the low have their own discourses. However, the term discourse can also be used to imply only that of the high. My use of "The Word of the Fathers" is actually contextualised in this usage is interchangeably used with discourse.

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