

‘Stealing the White Man's Weapon or
Forging One's Own?’ African and African-
American English in Ce's *Children of
Koloko* and Morrison's *Beloved*

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Introduction

IF THEY brought very little with them from the old world two centuries earlier, European immigrants certainly brought their mother tongue and established its sovereignty in the new world. Thus the English language belongs to white persons in ante- and post-bellum nineteenth-century America. African-American characters such as in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* illustrate at length how white persons use the English language both to name and characterize phenomena, to make sense of their world, as well as to help perpetuate the myths of racial superiority.

Born into a civilization of white hegemony –cultural and, of course, linguistic– the African-American, if he is cunning, will steal the property of his master: his language and use it against him as a retaliatory weapon. But the novels also demonstrate that the African-American culture is

capable of creating its own language –not simply a variation of Standard English, be it better or worse, but a language characterized by the nature of its communication rather than by its structure. The African-American language that Morrison presents seems to rival, in the case of characters who establish and use it, any attempts on their part to borrow and implement the tongue of their white masters. Their own language is like the antithesis of what was brought to America from England and deposited there: the language of thesis, of English. While the latter corrodes them the former is unique to their own experiences, has healing properties and, lastly, enables its speakers to communicate with mysterious and startling efficacy. It is, in brief, theirs. It is derived from English but resonates with the uniqueness of their unfortunate place in American history; it evokes their culture, the events and vignettes in which they and their ancestors were spiritually formed.

Since the African-American had little to no identity in the first place as a slave, we should not wonder that his/her language, which emerged in proportion as he/she was freed physically and spiritually, should retain the powerful marks of something that was seminal, something that was forged as men and women were forged, something that was used for the first time in situations that helped define a new race in a new world. When the English language is taken unleavened from the whites it perverts the growth of the African-American identity; when forged anew it saves, heals and helps define a culture.

The English language belongs first to the whites, and

functions sometimes as a weapon, a means of cultural control over slaves. As prelapsarian Adams, whites use language to give names to things, to taxonomize phenomena. African-American slaves were among such phenomena and, as in the case of the first animals, were given names by that force (whites-Adams) with dominion over them. In *Beloved* Mr. Garner, for example, provides Baby Suggs with a name different from that to which she is accustomed, that with which she grew up. "If I was you I'd stick to Jenny Whitlow," he advises her. "Mrs. Baby Suggs ain't no name for a freed Negro" (Morrison 167). But "Baby Suggs" is not simply an arbitrary appellation. Even the Saussurean might concede that it has more weight as a signifier than "Jenny," since it was, after all, "all she had left of the 'husband' she claimed" (168-9), the husband who gave her the name. Mr. Garner does not merely give Baby Suggs a new name in this case but destroys an existing one. And as a white person, he is legitimated in his nominal act. English is his. This point is encapsulated nicely by Morrison when, after a failed attempt to get himself out of trouble via a clever manipulation of the white language he has learned as a slave, Sixo is chastised by Schoolteacher who "beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers not to the defined" (225). And aside from simply naming things, from being the "definers", whites exercise their cultural hegemony to a large extent by means of language. Sethe tells Denver about Schoolteacher's habit of repeatedly asking his slaves questions, and that he would "carry round a notebook and write down what we said". She reasons that "it was them

questions that tore Sixo up” (44). Schoolteacher is acting after the fashion of the Englishman Haines in Joyce's *Ulysses*, who is interested in the “Irishness” of Stephen Daedalus only as an anthropologist is interested in, say, the behavior of an aboriginal culture. Language helps Schoolteacher to codify or taxonomize African-Americans into the appropriate strata of animals, which is the hypothesis—that blacks are animals—upon which he beings to interrogate his slaves.

Occasionally, however, an African-American finds it useful to appropriate the English language for his/her own purpose—or weapon—typically as a means to combat, compete with or deceive white persons, although in most cases blacks resent English and feel helplessly foreign to it. For an example of the former, Halle “loved [...] the alphabet”, Denver tells us. “He could count on paper” (245). The pun in the phrasal verb “count on” suggests that Halle can both count numbers on paper as well as rely upon the advantages generally afforded by linguistic savvy. Halle's motive, interestingly, is purely self-defense: Denver remembers him saying that “If you can't count they can cheat you”, and that “If you can't read they can beat you” (245). Similarly, Ralph Ellison's invisible man perceives language as a means of sleight, as a tool to be used cautiously and defensively:

I had to be careful though, not to speak too much like a northern Negro; they wouldn't like that. The thing to do, I thought with a smile, was to give them hints that whatever you did or said was weighted with broad and mysterious meanings that lay just beneath the surface. (178)

This case is particularly ironic, since the narrator, in making this decision, will speak neither like a northern nor a southern “Negro”, but like a white person. As we shall see, African-American language is characterized by its comparative forthrightness, its immediacy, its unequivocal nature –not by its duplicity. But these two cases are the exception; most African-Americans resent the language to such an extent that they refuse to appropriate it even as a means to arm themselves culturally. One slave fears that book-learning and language would “change his mind –make him forget things he shouldn't and memorize things he shouldn't” (Morrison 245).

The abnegation of black language, it seems, necessitates the abnegation of a black culture that is woven into that language; most African-Americans are not willing to make that sacrifice, or at least they do not think that it will amount to anything. They are pessimistic and concessive in their reception of the use of white English. Sethe remarks that “Schoolteacher was teaching us things we couldn't learn” (226). Baby Suggs, working in the kitchen with Mrs. Gardner, “talked as little as she could get away with because what was there to say that the roots of her tongue could manage?” (166). Most Sweet Home men were allowed “even [to] learn reading if they wanted to –but they didn't want to since nothing important to them could be put down on paper” (147). Sixo even stops speaking English altogether, since “there was not future in it” (30).

The *Beloved* language of Toni Morrison

If there is no future in white English, then clearly something new must be forged. A linguistic antithesis is necessary if African-American culture is to blossom; it needs a language of its own. In *Beloved* we see the signs of the nascent, growing language. Needless to say, it can be interpreted and explained in a number of different ways, although one may extract three characteristics of this language that, taken together, seem justifiably to represent the scope of its nature as manifested in Morrison's novel. They are its unique relevancy to the African-American experience, its healing properties and its spirituality or mysteriousness.

The African-American language in *Beloved* grows in part out of its serviceable nature, its adaptability to a given crisis or situation. Characters find themselves speaking in a language they scarcely knew they had developed, a language that emerges almost teleologically, as if to help them out of a bind or guide them through sudden hard times. When Paul D. and the slaves to which he is enchained escape from the Georgia prison camp, their success is in large part a result of the common language whereby they collectively sustain themselves, endure the unendurable:

With a sledge hammer in his hands and Hi Man's lead, the men got through. They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been; the animals they had tamed themselves or seen others tame. They sang of bosses and masters and misses; of mules and

dogs and the shamelessness of life. They sang lovingly of graveyard and sisters long gone. Or pork in the woods; meal in the man; fish on the line; cane, rain and rocking chairs. (128)

The end of this language is not surface-communication: the men “garble” the words with the result that they cannot understand one another. They “trick” the words with the result that the very syllables do not mean what they may have been intended to mean. The key to translation is in the deep structure. Superficially they sing about common ideas such as men and women, bosses, animals, death, eating, weather and furniture. The real import of their speech, however, is fortitude, brotherhood, the excitement and fear they all acknowledge that simultaneously inflame them, propel them as if to an undiscovered country.

Perhaps certain oral traditions are inaugurated on this day of liberation, of the sort the fugitives could teach their children and their children's children. The songs animate them, are forged out of the experience. Paul D. speaks elsewhere of such “songs he knew from Georgia”, which “were flat-headed nails for pounding and pounding and pounding” (48). As a newly domesticated father figure, of course, such songs “didn't fit” his new, tamer household life. “They were too loud, had too much power for the little house chores he was engaged in -resetting table legs; glazing” (48). We can see here that certain songs are preferred in certain contexts, which makes sense, seeing that the songs arose directly from experience and inevitably evoke the experiences that begot them. Paul D. the father figure must

think of new songs while he lives with Sethe, Denver and Beloved.

Another characteristic of African-American language is related to the first, but more focused in definition: it is that the language has healing properties. Toward the end of the novel, Sethe is spiritually moribund on account of her guilt and inability to completely justify the murder of her daughter. She continues in a downward spiral of despondency until roused by uniquely effective words by the thirty women that come to her rescue:

For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of the women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (308)

Here we have a sort of meta-language, not unlike that of the escaping prisoners. The meaning of the women's words is not in the words, but in the “key, the code, the sound that broke the back of the words”. The women have to come together in a special sort of solidarity; they have to try to speak the words again and again, “building voice upon voice”, until finally the signifiers are disabled and the performative, remedial speech is unleashed. And the language is so powerful, stripped of the mere words that have had their “backs broken”, that Sethe is veritably “baptized in

its wash". She is transformed. We get the sense here that the intervention of a white preacher, using language peculiar to white culture, would not have so exorcised Sethe as these women have done. It would have hung on the air, remained stagnant.

The third and last characteristic of the new tongue is its mysteriousness. Morrison seems deliberately abstract when she conveys certain types of dialogue and communication, as if to suggest that some occurrences of African-American communication are more spiritual than linguistic; that real communication takes place only in the unique confluence a variety of circumstances, including but not limited to language. Denver and Beloved speak in "Sweet, crazy conversations full of half sentences, daydreams and misunderstandings more thrilling than understanding could ever be" (80). "More thrilling than understanding"--Morrison is pressing the idea of a new language, unfettered, as it were, by understanding. She is being comical here, in suggesting that language even has a purpose more important than "understanding". But the idea is that a certain vernacular has arisen out of the exceptionally dreadful conditions of slavery, conceived in unfathomable circumstances and made of the residual power of those circumstances --a power beyond "understanding".

Like the exchange between Denver and Beloved, Sethe and Paul D. experience a sort of mysterious transaction: they share a common history, each interested in "things neither knew about the other -- the things neither had word-- shapes for [...]" (116). That experience must be powerful, even

beyond understanding, for which there are no “word-shapes”. There is indeed a significance in these verbal exchanges that seems able to be comprehended only by those who, to some extent, have participated in the circumstances that engendered the new language –great enslavement and dehumanization.

Slavery, a devastating lot, had called for a language powerful enough to confront it –to express it and heal its wounds and grasp its mystery. It was nonsensical to use the language of the master in order to articulate the experience of the enslaved. For this reason Morrison's characters learn a new language, learn to speak on a potent, spiritual level unique to their history.

If white English is the thesis and African-American English the antithesis, we think that the synthesis remains to be discovered; we do not think it is something in which Morrison is pointedly interested in this novel. Perhaps there will arise a language that blends the experiences of both the Euro- and the African-American, and this faithfully, not artificially, so that the history of the one becomes indistinguishable from the history of the other, each with the common end of telling a single, unbroken American story.

Lingua-Cultural bastardy in Ce's *Children of Koloko*

Chin Ce's fictional narrative of postcolonial Africa, *Children of Koloko*, is manifestly distinctive in purpose. It is a work of satire which also aims at much didacticism, its intent being to correct and point an alternative course. Thus may Chin Ce's fiction be distinguished from the deeply sympathetic

intensity of Morrison's *Beloved*.

In a different setting in an African heartland, the characters of Chin Ce's *Children of Koloko* are at odds with their present hybrid traditions. Unlike their African American counterparts, these people are not impeded by the feeling of being uprooted from (cultural) ancestry. Rather they are encumbered by a colonial heritage that contradicts their native wisdom, the symptom of which their use of the English language forms a main part.

Here in Koloko, the ancient language of measured controlled and deliberate wisdom has degenerated by the infusion of new modern life ways that only serve to further alienate the people from their roots. Language becomes a hollow act full of mere pretence and barren innuendos.

We are made to see this earlier in young Yoyo's daydream recollections at Boko; the Americanism he puts on occasionally with his friend Nunu is clearly an act: "What the hell is the old man bossing and hollering for? One of these days were I'm gonna pull him...Dammit!" (26). Its hollowness is underlined by their idle frolicking through foreign magazines, the source of this juvenile fantasy which lasts only briefly. The narrator rightly calls them the "make-believe." (26). Later in Koloko, Fathead also adopts the make-believe to garner some feeling of importance on each return from his "foreign tours". The narrator tells how the rich owner of a multi million naira mansion will publicly dress down his building contractor "adding to it a repertoire of Americanisms, like 'slob,' 'dummy,' and 'bum,' for the benefit of any one around" (76). Vulgar ostentation assumes a

foreign import, a materialism of the western arriviste. At the house warming ceremony Fathead declares: “money is an international language” (133), which evidently makes purchase of an assortment of English, French, German, Swedish and Russian wines a simple act of generosity. It is the language of satire which grows progressively as “Fathead bows in the European fashion”(133) in the usual imitation of his mentors.

The language of this fictional Nigerian village is in sharp contrast to the language of the black people of Morrison's novel. The ebullient narrator in *Children of Koloko* is constrained by the changing order of living: his language combines African sensitivities and western modernity with often despairing consequences. For instance, the dialogue between Yoyo and Kata is tinged with rustic inflections, reflecting the rural sentiment of the old woman that has always been there in the cultural background of the entire story. Kata deftly maneuvers the discussion and starts out with folk benignity, or a pretension of such: “It will be good for you...and him too” (42), she begins. Kata is about to recast history, a past in which she had seen better days and played “noble” roles toward her one-time ward, Fathead. She does this with native cunning and sense of the dramatic which elicit amusement: “She made a face, rubbed her stubby nose, and spat through tobacco-stained teeth. Little Ada recoiled in horror”(45). To young Yoyo's mind her laughter “was very much like the hyena's” while her tactics reminds him of the “old tortoise” (42) she was. During the chat Kata describes Fathead whom we have now learnt was her one-time ward, as

“a true son of the land who knows how to look after old people” (42), and talking about joint pains she says “I feel like someone bashed thoroughly with a pestle” (43). Her plaintive solicitation at the rich man's quarters is a trickster's act cast in traditional badinage: “It's my waist-o! I have no money...” (44).

Even in expletives which are but further symptoms of this deterioration of language art, Kata's curses induce are descriptive distortions of physical qualities. To her observation, Mabelle, Fathead's stepmother walks “baka baka as if...” (47) and Lukeman whom Yoyo claims bought all his pears on credit is a “drink-and-fall-by-the-gutter oaf” (41). Kata calls Abeze “husband beater” (52) in bipartite insult on the woman for her intractability –“big and belligerent”– and on Old Bap's (her brother's) seeming lack of power to tame his shrew wife, Abeze.

The names of people in Koloko locale are similarly distorted. Characters take on a new name from an illiterate distortion of the phonetic: the train is “turan” (46) for Kata; or from what is clearly semi-literate or broken assimilation of the white man's language: “inconveniences” is “inconsequency” even for missionary-educated Obeku (Old Bap) whose English is said to be “nearest the Queen's” (88). “Reputation” is “repudiate” for JJC who also says “lest” instead of “let's,” (64-67) etc.

The image of Big Mam's, described as a “huge tree-trunk of laps” (49) calls the tropical baobab to mind. “In those days,” the narrator says “she only had to bark once to send the bravest fellow behind the mask tearing away in disregard of

his own dignified presence” (52). The cultural inversion of a masked spirit (masquerade) backing up in fear of a human is a strong indicator of the grandmother's (read this African village's) legendary power ironically dwindled or diminished over time. Now her barking would only confirm an old proverb that said “a barking dog would never bite you” (52). Most or every expression in a traditional or modern sense goes to suggest that the majority of the citizens of Koloko society are now less effectual in character and training than their grandparents had been in times past. Tuma who always begins his story with a reference to those old times is always fond of saying: “Nowadays elders no longer teach the young ones or show befitting examples...and so we young men have not learned from them”(96).

By the use of nicknames, language in Koloko society grows progressively hollow. Nicknames in place of actual names of persons is laughter on a recent tradition of title taking, a phenomenon of cultural bastardies in the growing modernity where no one queried how anyone built his/her financial empire. Fante Ayadu is the real name of Fathead, the nickname referring to his figure which looks like “a man-size caterpillar standing on its tail” (72). Yoyo's father is Foreman Obeku but every child affectionately calls him Bap. Big Mam is Abeze –the term of Big Mam referring both to her size and her position as grandmother in the family just as elder Obeku himself, the narrator's grandfather is called Old Bap. Chief Dogomutun had taken on the ridiculous title of Dogkiller because he liked the “the manner of high pitch and long drawn voice” by which his political tout called the sobriquet

after he had killed “six dogs with three shots” (34) of his gun. A gun wielding politician does not seem uncommon in local politics. Later he is described as a “good for nothing politician” (166) by a member of the press corps for bagging a jail term. Before his jail term Dogomutun is reported to have confessed he would “drink palm wine through the nose while making the million with his fingers” (162), in a language of traditional myth making that suggests the deeper import that the chief is either drunk and therefore mentally unstable all the time or earns his way through some other equally dubious means.

Where there are praise names they merely serve the purpose of ridicule. In addition, other praise names are concocted by admirers and fawners like Okon and Ade with such lavish descriptiveness as “young multi-millionaire-in-Koloko-and-beyond”, “shining star”, etc. Okon himself is nicknamed the Billy and the title had stuck to his name like the real thing. The three boys like to think of Okon as “parrot and woodpecker” in one (82), suggesting that Okon, like most other Koloko townsmen, is worth only talkative or noise value. Dickie says of him, using a lexical pun to denote the smooth fakery of the local cheerleader, “He's too warm and that's how he worms his way...” (82).

Unlike in Achebe's novels which celebrate the staid and germane dignity of oral art through proverbs, here in Koloko there are no such elevations of thought and mastery of traditional eloquence. There are little or no incidents for proverbs, and the lack of them points to the general diminution of African values in Koloko. Although Mika had

glibly remarked: “all of us come from one father. Same father Lokoko who gave birth to she who gave birth to another” (130), there is no elaborate detail or legend of ancestry that in local tradition would serve to bind the people with a feeling of tribal oneness, a sense of shared obligations and loyalty. Such is the bane of this traditional society that some distortions of Christian creation story emerge in their legend of ancestry. Kiza elaborates upon a story about Koloko's perennial seasons of frivolity and says: “Our ancestor, Lokoko, was said to have clowned before God on the night of creation and when the good Lord gave him a gigantic pot he broke it into pieces” (165).

Kiza further tells his listeners that “out of the rubble emerged a minstrel who vowed his descendants would forever make his neighbours happy with the sound of laughter in their ears” (165). Making neighbors happy is euphemism for the English idiom of becoming the laughing stock of the community. Thus as the new language of this African society deteriorates with westernizing sophistication, use of proverbs remains sparse, just as with Africa's economic poverty and social deprivation, ancient heritage or culture can be thrown overboard. The classic example is the statement by Mika the palm wine dealer at the house opening ceremony of the political stalwart: “A hungry man does not waste his time on proverbs when the real meal is before him” (133).

Fathead, chief celebrant, had earlier told his audience “gbata-gbata is a language that has two faces: it might mean good, it might mean disaster” (131), and is rather proud that

his particular *gbata-gbata* (author does not provide translation but we might deduce this to mean a rally) holds good tidings of the culinary kind which the people rather enjoyed. Amanda Grants mentions the abuse of tradition in Fathead's two proverbs. "In this drama of social and communal acquiescence, tradition is made culprit," she notes, and rightly adds that all those men and women who applaud Fathead "are unlike their modern enlightened liberated counterparts who acquiesce to the impoverishment of their nation state so long as it carves for them a niche of the social table" (17).

Yoyo himself thinks that Fathead had chosen to declare a public feast and should be held responsible for the rowdiness at his homestead. "Was it not he who declared a feast and the lizards came calling?" (145). This is in reference to a traditional Igbo proverb that says a man who brings in ant-infested faggots to his compound should naturally expect the visit of lizards. Yoyo knows this proverb but does not execute it well enough. It is artfully explored by Achebe in his works *Arrow of God*: Ezeulu, scolding his wife who resents and blames him for their son's outrageous act against the sacred python, says to her: "You must be telling me in your mind that a man who brings home ant-infested faggots should not complain if he is visited by lizards. You are right" (59). He is to use this proverb again in an argument with his friend while pointing out that the responsibility for disunity of the tribe laid with the traitors among the people and not him who had only chosen to send one of his sons to learn the white man's ways.

...white men would not have overrun entire Olu and Igbo if we did not help them. Who showed them the way to Abame? ...So let nobody come to me now and complain that the white man did this and did that. The man who brings in ant-infested faggots into his hut should not grumble when lizards begin to pay him a visit. (132)

Ironically the same proverb is used later again against Ezeulu himself,¹ which proves traditional Igbo belief in self-responsibility, or the imperative to pin-point the root of a vexatious problem. But the general paucity of proverb use in Koloko village is a good indication that the new-agers of Koloko have lost some of Africa's finest traditions. In their quest for social notability or relevance under the white man's laws and standards to the exclusion or neglect of their own values, this loss comes as no real surprise.

The satire on 'General' Dickie and his 'madness' is symptomatic of the psychic disorder of African leaders in modern society –a theme amply illustrated in all the Koloko stories. Here the language is typical of the narrator's jaunty, deprecatory attitude towards his people and all their affairs:

What looked like a joke soon became a matter of communal embarrassment when Dickie began to prevent people from passing the road that ran through his frontage to the market square. How dared they pass the street without saluting General Dickie? he barked.(179)

One may contrast this with Yoyo's earlier wishes for a compassionate distancing from his community and may

wonder exactly what this language and attitude of inconsistency in the hero-narrator could hold for his society.

Dora was reclining on the sofa next to Bap's avoiding every body's eyes with placid disinterest. Dora was so much like my Mam. Always keeping her opinions to herself, she surpassed even the holy Mary. Unknown to her, Dora had given me a clue as to the new attitude to hold for these sons and daughters of Koloko. (177)

It may be conceded that at this point of the hero's return to native land there is a subtle change in his attitude to his people. But this attitude of goodwill which the Koloko hero claims to give his people could also mean one of defeat or indifference. It can be witnessed here in Yoyo's treatment of his old chum recuperating in a psychiatric home:.

Dickie ... merely looked at me as I gripped his hand in a parting greeting.

'See you around, guy,' I told him.

'Yeah, Catch you in the next life,' Dickie replied. (182)

And along the way a mischievous idea that Dickie is paying a price for killing chickens in cold blood dominates the hero's thoughts.

We have to look back to the village meeting of Koloko for some reminder of a tradition of oratorical elegance often celebrated in tribal life. But here too this eloquence comes in snatches. For instance, Foreman Obeku's familiar line of argument is delivered through a reconstruction of one of the numerous tortoise legends.

'Tortoise brought new woman to the clan and for reasons known to him, warned all his randy boys, "let no one touch even a scale of her body!"

'Every one in the clan obeyed father tortoise and avoided the newest young and beautiful member like a caste --that is, not touching a scale of her body.' (103)

Legends form a major aspect of West African folklore. And as Okpewho argues, folklore is more than just the "literary aspect of what the folk do" (4). In other words, it is the world view and life of traditional Africa. Hearing the learned teacher Foreman Obeku (Bap) relay some of the old tales, we experience the pale, flickering world of the past again. In any case it enlivens the discourse and aptly seals the verdict—even if a misguided one—against the elders at the village meeting.

Apart from Obeku, Yoyo's father, whose eloquence is apparent by his use of the trickster story to condemn the elders for Koloko's problems, we can see in the women, represented by Aina their leader, real matriarchal power over anti-social behaviours. Again this is almost a forgotten heritage. Nevertheless her oral rhetoricism contrasts sharply with the narrator's (Yoyo's) own abrupt "point-blank" narrative.

'The elders have spoiled the village!' her voice was nonsense and point-black, 'because they lost the wisdom to teach their young who look up to them.

'What happens when the nanny is chewing her cud?' she barked.

'The tender ones are watching the rhythm of her mouth!' came the women's chorus. This was followed by a roar of applause among them while our mesmerised men could only watch. Da Aina raised her aims revealing her flabby Christian mother's muscles and there was quietness again in the seated assembly.' (102)

In spite of this community dialogue, *Children of Koloko* as a modern narrative creates an English that is incongruous for tribal or communal expressions. This sad displacement or consequent loss of the traditional "beloved" language of yore does not leave all hopes lost. There are still the likes of Aina and Foreman Obeku through whom the African society may continue to hand forth its fount of traditional aesthetics even as the younger generation, embodied in Ce's narrator gropes for direction.

Conclusion

Chin Ce's and Toni Morrison's worlds are clearly at opposite divides in spite of common ancestral depths. While Toni Morrison's novel seeks to demonstrate that the African-American culture is capable of creating its own mystifying meaning out of the language of the white masters, it seems to be Ce's idea that in a modern African environment where progress is equated with vulgar western civilization, African language, culture and tradition are doomed to the desert of aridity and suffocation.

The English language of the *Koloko* stories may not be a variation of Standard English. The stories point to a near- if not total loss of heritage; they seem to suggest that the

language we witness in the older novels of Achebe has been, like the modern states of Africa years after independence, lost in an emerging adolescent modernity. One is no less in agreement with its introductory statements that Ce's particularity on "the drift of his generation, in harmony with the thematic bent of the entire work is (much more than) a sardonic humour"(14). Chin Ce reassesses a heritage that is becoming trivialized by "those persons whose lives, in their entirety, are no more serious" (14) than the colloquialism of the language of narrative. Morrison celebrates a new black just as Ce is critical of the new African tradition.

Note

¹ This time Nwaka uses the proverb against Ezeulu, his rival, when he says: "a man who brings in ant-ridden faggots into his hut should expect the visit of lizards. But if Ezeulu is telling us that he is tired of the white man's friendship our advice to him should be: *You tied the knot, you should also know how to undo it...*" Again the lesson here is on taking responsibility for every action no matter how trifle it seems.

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