

# The Works of Chin Ce: A Critical Overview

*By Irene marques*

## **Too Much Newness: *Children of Koloko***

DJOCKOUA MANYAKA Toko in his essay “Educating the Child with Camara Laye's *The Dark Child* and Chin Ce's *Children of Koloko*” provides in-depth and sound comparative discourse of the education given to the protagonists of Camara Laye's *The Dark Child* and Chin Ce's *Children of Koloko*. Despite the fact that the two novels depict colonial and post-colonial societies respectively, they do in many ways bring to debate the same issue: how to positively imprint African cultural values on the minds of youngsters, especially in the face of constant interference of exogenic values.

With its emphasis on community, family, as well as the natural and spiritual world, and the relationality between all of these, the African traditional community teaches the child to respect others and otherness, and to also show responsibility for his/her actions actions that may affect the balance of the community. By showing how the main protagonists of both works become strong and balanced

individuals precisely because they are anchored in African conventional wisdom and cultural values, Toko demonstrates that Chin Ce and Camara Laye believe in the importance of Africa's culture as a springboard for 'real' growth and success of the continent. By raising children to believe and respect the positive aspects of African conventional wisdoms, it is then possible to have balanced and fulfilled human beings who know how to find steadiness, even in the face of violent sea waves, in short, adults who are spiritually, psychologically and communally grounded and do not fall into utter madness like Dickie does in *Children of Koloko*. As Toko argues, both Laye's and Ce's novels seem to favour an education that will take into account traditional African values, while at the same time welcoming western values which will contribute to the amelioration of the lives of African peoples. The creation of a hybrid way, or a "middle course" (11) as Amanda Grants might rather say, is what both Laye and Ce seem to be advocating for in their respective novels. After all, how can one really know the weather of today, and think about the sun of tomorrow, if one cannot remember the suns and rains of yesterday?

Jonas Cope and Kay Chester use the language-relativist<sup>1</sup> approach in their critique of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Chin Ce's *Children of Koloko*. The authors demonstrate how language is a fundamental tool to 'say' the being it wants and needs to say: to 'say' the African-American slave or the unstable and unsure postcolonial subject of Nigeria. Is it then a question of "Stealing the White Man's Weapon or Forging One's Own?" they ask. Cope and Chester illustrate how the

speaking of a language is a complicated and multifaceted affair. Speaking a language that is different from the language of the white master is, for the characters of *Beloved*, a socio-political, ontological and spiritual gesture--gesture that produces a sense of identity, cohesion and discovery for most Black Americans. Speaking a language that the master cannot understand is thus a way to defend the Self against the Other, a way to create or recreate that very Self. Initially this Self needs to be the Antithesis of the master's Thesis, yes, only because the Thesis is too alienating, too reductive, where the Other is not, cannot, be part of the Self, for the Self in his blindness, fails to see outside His lens.

But to speak and forge a language that not even the Black-American slave can understand can also be highly liberating for he and she who utter it for the very first time, for when language "overstands"<sup>2</sup> as the Rastafarians will say, then we understand: You and I, Him and Her, are able to travel beyond the stagnant poverty often enforced by linguistic classifications and enter the divine, the realm where seeing in fact is being. Many poets and writers have already affirmed this conviction, and so have the Buddhists<sup>3</sup>. And so has Morrison, and quite beautifully in *Beloved*.

But can we say that that 'Beloved' language is also the language of *Children of Koloko*? Chin Ce's story-collection seems to be a language of loss, a language of confusion, rather than the language of liberation, or of findings. Ce's characters inhabit a postcolonial world where greed, corruption, despair and deprecation for African traditional values seem to prevail--a world where youths are not learning

from the elaborate, complex and literary oral traditions that once were vibrating sounds, live powerful metaphors, constantly caressing and nourishing the minds of the youths. The speech “parroted” by Ce's characters seems poor, colloquial and spiritually devoid: just like their lives. By displaying this poor speech, Chin Ce's seems to be pointing the finger and saying: “Look at how poor we have become...” He seems to be mourning that *Beloved* language of the Nigerian (and African) past. But can that language be recovered, recreated? Can we say that the poor dwellers of *Children of Koloko* are the only “parrots” of the contemporary world? Have you paid attention to the language that the Western youths tend to speak? Too much television perhaps and all the other technological advances... And not enough stories told by the fireplace, those stories intertwined with the flickering mystery of the yellow and red flames to nourish the soul... Too much newness and what we might need is the old reawakened.

### **'Diagnostician of State': *Gamji College***

In her essay “Chin Ce and the Postcolonial Dialogue of *Gamji College*” Gloria Emezue offers a comparison between Chin Ce's *Gamji College* and some of Achebe's novels. Emezue argues that *Gamji College*, with Ce's other fictions and some of his early poetry in general, revolves around three fundamental precepts: “the commitment to and awareness of his environment, the testing of its notions on the scale of general communal good and past history, and the artist's response to this test being the rejection of unwholesome,

even if popular paradigms that paralyse or constrain genuine social transformation”(90). She rightly maintains that there is in Ce's work a concern with dialogue, a preoccupation to uncover the behaviours of postcolonial Nigerian subjects, an attempt to show the reader the miserable state of affairs of the Nigerian post-colonial nation, and also, an attempt to devise another way of being, of seeing, of understanding, of questioning that could lead to a better and more realized nation. Like in *An African Eclipse*, or in some of Chin Ce's other works, the narrative/authorial voice does not merely want to show the reader what is wrong, but also why things are wrong and what might constitute a better alternative. The writer wants to engage in the displaying of history for the understanding of that very history is crucial if favourable change is to occur. The post-colonial subject cannot, or should not, disregard history pre, colonial, and postcolonial history -- for it is the very understanding of that history, and the dynamics between pre, colonial and postcolonial societies that will allow him/her to create a nation in a truer sense of the word. A nation that will take into account pre and post colonial socio-political dynamics is an informed nation, a richer nation, a conscientious nation.

The relationship between past, present and future is of extreme importance, thus the need for education the writer is the educator, the one who allows for transhistorical, transpersonal, and even transfictional dialogue to take place. The writer allows for dialogue between characters and also dialogue between characters and readers. Such multiple dialogues permit a more wholesome understanding of the

troubles of the post-colonial nation via constant direct or indirect expositions of socio-historical realities. The writer exposes the different situations and the different characters in such a fashion that the reader can see him/herself reflected in them, allowing for self-recognition and thus 'conscientization'--the first step to positive action. The one who interacts inside the fiction (the character) and the one who reads that fiction (the reader) learns from either directly experiencing, observing or reflecting about the misery, confusion, wise and unwise decision-making of the 'players' of what comes across as a clearly unhealthy nation.

Just like Jerry and Tai (*Gamji College*) seem to learn from observing the miseries of others, the reader too can learn from the display of mostly decadent situations, actions and poor or misinformed ways of thinking and perceiving reality. The very discussion between the youths in the section “The Bottle” allows for the reader and the characters to learn or reflect upon what is happening to them. The inebriated state of the characters allows for a discussion that is mostly nonsensical and which borders upon the psychotic. But it might be precisely because of the nature of this discussion that both readers and (maybe less) characters are able to realize how things are out of control, 'out' of humanity, in sheer dis-humanity, absurd in a widened sense of the term, and the reasons why that might be. For instance, the youth Milord, in his state of utter drunkenness has a hazy (confused) vision of himself as someone inserted in history, be it past or future. The questions Ce seems to be asking are: How does one maintain oneself adequately sober (informed

and aware) so that one is capable of seeing oneself as an agent that is inserted in history, and consequently, also as an agent capable of making, and changing that very history? How do we have a clear, holistic and interdynamical understanding of history so that we can then pave the way for a more genuine and ethical society?

We can see therefore in Ce's works that the mirror effect is present in various ways: the mirror of history via the use of overt or covert inter-dynamic historical representations and the mirror of character-to-character or character-to-reader. This multi-dimensional didactic mirror is a narrative technique of major importance in *Gamji College*, and also in several of Ce's other fictional or poetic works. By making use of this mirror –by putting the malaises on display and by showing the many agents, and trans-historical and socio-religio-politico 'agencies' that are making the society the putrid pit it is– the writer, like the doctor, is writing a complete and thorough chart, thus becoming what Coetzee calls “the medical diagnostician of the state” (qtd. in Hamilton 98). In a manner similar to Michel Foucault, the writer becomes the intellectual whose main responsibility is to show the many dynamics that are 'constituting' us, playing us, the dynamics that are making us blind agents or subjects who obey without reflection, without questioning--without careful dissection of the vast trans-historical institutional beast and its many circular and cavernous effects<sup>4</sup>. But, and like any good doctor, and perhaps in a more prescriptive manner than Foucault, who has described himself as non-prescriptive (*Power* 240), it seems that Ce does more than

diagnose or describe: he prescribes, he offers a cure, or at least the beginning of a cure. And that cure, or the beginning of that cure, lies in showing that a constant dialogue between past, present and future is the fundamental recipe for success, the fundamental recipe for a more accomplished postcolonial nation.

In 'Pedagogy of Disillusionment: The Case of Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal* and Chin Ce's *Gamji College*' Kenneth Usongo suggests that the self-realization of his state of subjugation by the oppressed in Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal* is the first step towards the eradication of colonial oppression and the rebuilding of Afro-centred cultural pride and success. The author shows us how the protagonist of the novel, Meka, gradually realizes that he is not much more than a necessary broker, or a make-believe agent, between the French colonial master and the local Cameroonian people an agent that helps the French spread their power and culture locally thus nullifying African values, yet one who gains no real power in the process. Meka starts off with a naïve expectation about the benefits that such an alliance with the colonial master will bring him, then moves onto all the anxieties, uncertainties and confusion about his place and value as a 'real' subject within the unequal colonial dichotomy of Self/Other, only to finally reach the point of disillusion. This point of disillusion is crucial for the oppressed subjects under consideration in Oyono's novel since it reveals to them the real intention of the colonizer, thus making them aware of the necessity to act and take charge of their lives. In that sense Oyono's novel is pedagogic as



Usongo asserts in the very title of his article.

In a similar way, Chin Ce's collection of stories, *Gamji College*, Usongo further avers, mirrors the stages of expectations, dream fragmentations and disillusionment in its three sections: "The Cross," "The Bottle," and "The Gun". *Gamji College* shows how the death of direct European colonialism did not end economical and cultural imperialism, oppression, violence and disappointment since the colonial authorities were replaced with neo-colonial figures that perpetuate the cycle of mal-governance and become obsessed with material wealth and imitation of Western values, often discarding African values of brotherhood and communalism. Christian religion appears as the favourite sister of the state, creating a despotic state-nation where the president, *à la façon* of the opulent French King Louis the XIV, impersonates God, imposing his will and controlling all the mechanisms to ensure his throne. *Gamji College* is therefore the metaphor for the Nigerian (and African) post-colonial messy state-nation, that *beast* that cannot stop being a *beast*, that state that yearns to become a nation.

It is the likes of young Tai and Jerry who, in their utter disillusionment, find it necessary to reject the greed, corruption, group favouritism, blind religious fanaticism and violent nihilism of their society. They do so by asserting their view and position or by removing themselves from certain situations or from the company of people who remind them of their own disillusion. In a way, the people they interact with function as mirrors showing them what they themselves have or can become, but also what they do not want to become. The

ugliness of those mirrors has a positive effect on them: it reminds them of the dreams they might have or the dreams they once had and the goals they still want to realize. It is the disenchantment of others, constantly being reflected back at them, that propels them to resist the trend of moral decay, greed and nihilism. Thus they are the ones who give us hope, hope that the nation will be one day, hope that the beautiful one, the true African Princess, will shine forth. For now though she seems to be only pulsating under Bisi's heavy artificial mascara and meditated catwalk.

**New States of Being: *The Visitor***

In his reading of *The Visitor*, Chin Ce's full-length and --most complex-- novel, Okuyade Ogaga illustrates how Ce uses a mixture of realist, modernist and Africanist narrative techniques to create a unique novel --a novel that mixes western narrative methods with African traditions of storytelling. In a fashion similar to modernist writers, Ce weaves a narrative where truth and being, their unstable, indefinable and ever-changing nature, and the multiplicity of voice figure as the foundation of his novelistic poetics. By so doing Ce is able to demonstrate the 'hybrid' and changing nature of many African post-colonial nations

We are privy to nations whose identity oscillates between Africanness and Westernness, between embracing African values and Western ones, between epistemologies that value reason and unidimensionality and those that esteem mystical, unconscious and holistic dimensions of life's apprehension.

As in many of the other works produced by Ce, the mystical dimension is presented to us as the most complete for it allows us to be in a grander way. It allows us to exit the smallness of the corrupt world of Nigeria, where gun violence, bribery, and moral decay are regrettably too frequent and do prevent us from seeing. *The Visitor* allows us to connect past, present and future, to become aware of ourselves in a broader manner, to travel through the world of the ancestors or the spirit plane, where being is, where the world is no longer a market place as the Igbo saying, placed at the beginning of Ce's novel foretells, but rather a home --that home where the inhabitants are no longer visitors but permanent dwellers instead. They are dwellers who, through a cross-temporal and cross-conscious didactic voyage, or a type of circular osmosis, can see outside of themselves only to see more deeply into themselves, and also into others.

These dwellers, --Grandad, Uzi, Adaku, etc.,-- with whom we get to be intimate in that 'maze' that is *The Visitor*, attain a state of being that brings about a profound and blissful transcendental completeness and connectedness. By seeing into the life of these dwellers through their alternate states of existence and consciousness, and through the rich and poetic imagery evoked by Ce, we the readers, are also pulled into their osmotic state, and are indeed reminded of an alternate existence, one that we can call sublime.

When we compare that sedate and grandly evolved existence to the bare and poor 'state of being' of the Nigerian contemporary society, and, more broadly, to many contemporary societies, we almost want to cry, or emit a sigh-

-that sigh of profound yearning.

**'The Chain of Ignorance': *An African Eclipse***

G.A.R Hamilton's study of Ce's collection of poetry *An African Eclipse* offers an alternative and profound view for the socio-political reformation of Nigeria necessitating its reissue in this volume. Drawing mainly on the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Gilles Deleuze and Chinua Achebe, Hamilton demonstrates how *An African Eclipse* is a work that aims at much more than pointing the finger at the moral and ethical flaws of post-independence political leaders--much more than the mere displaying of the socio-political arena of a very troubled nation.

By depicting the many psychosocial, ethnic and environmental miseries that have afflicted post-colonial Nigeria and by showing how such miseries are in many ways a result of what can be termed an individualistic, if not ignorant, ontology, Ce's poetry moves to the displaying of a non-personal Life force, presenting it as the solution to the general inertia affecting Nigeria. The poet paints this non-personal Life force, which can also be named the Soul, or the Social or Collective Ethics, as being oriented by the common good and not by the individual and egoistic desires of the single mind or minority group. For such ontological ethics of the collective to triumph it is necessary that each individual sees him/herself as a responsible agent, an able being capable of thinking outside that which is fed to him/her by the political corrupt machinery. The individual being must think, learn, become able, and break the chains of ignorance so that

he/she can then become a reliable and capable agent the one who can be the foundation of a Social-collective Ethics and of a new healthier Nigerian nation. There is, as Hamilton points out, a need to move from the State-organized ontologies into individual thinking, which will then become the basis of a renewed collective ontology.

Thus the poet of *An African Eclipse* also becomes a critic of the aggressive drive of modernization, capitalism and imperialism that permeates Nigeria with its rampant exploitation of natural resources disregarding the need for preservation of the Nigerian land, and its disinterest for a more equal distribution of resources. This aggressive drive and individualistic trend does not give enough consideration to the traditional values of community and inter-help and has little or no regard for nature, in other words, it shows minimal regard for what might be termed as a hermeneutics of holism—the positive values of the forefathers and foremothers who lived before our times. The new class of politicians and nation 'teachers' are not exemplary teachers, or, they are not teachers at all. They do not know how, or care, to teach their children (the citizens of Nigeria) because they constitute bad examples of governance and display the un-ethical characteristics of individualism, greed, corruption, ignorance, and psychological and physical violence.

In a fashion similar to many other politically conscious African writers, Ce becomes the teacher himself in the absence of capable politicians who can teach or govern a nation ethically, the writer/poet becomes “the medical diagnostician of the state” (98), Hamilton points out, directly

quoting J. M. Coetzee. As the conscientious “diagnostician,” the writer/poet shows people how things work in the wretched state but also how they ought to work in a state genuinely concerned with the welfare of its people.

Through his poetry, Ce tries to communicate with the reader by painting the present and past history of Nigeria and also by envisaging a future when things might be different when we might be “in the season of another [better] life” as the last poem of the collection points to. The poet is always careful to tell the reader to think and reflect back into history, to remember good and bad, to remember poverty and wealth, to “watch over the earth” so that the “ambitions that [may] lurk in the dark corners /of the mind” (58) might not take over, causing us to fall again into the darkness on the *African Eclipse*. This dialogue between present, past and future is fundamental for it serves to illustrate the intrinsic relationship that exists between the different temporal realities, thus showing the reader to learn from what has happened.

Chin Ce is therefore a didactic poet, emphasising the importance of knowing history well –what happened; how, why, or who was involved; or how all these play into the current state of affairs, and so forth. Only by being aware of the historical realities can the present Nigerian post-colonial subject emerge stronger, conscientious and realized, which in turn will allow for the surging of a new, stronger and reformed nation. There is in *An African Eclipse* an intimate camaraderie between the reader and the poetic subject. This intimate camaraderie further points to Ce's emphasis on the

'we', the collective and social ethics where reader and writer become agents involved in the same battle. As Hamilton contends, the writer is no longer the one "who simply represents experience through writing, which is to say a writer *"for or on the behalf of"* (113). Instead, the writer becomes

[A]n inextricable element of the people, who, in refusing to simply represent personal experiences, creates non-preexistent relations between poets, readers, and the process of becoming revolutionary, in order to demonstrate new possibilities of Life --new ways of living within Nigeria. (113)

It is the "I" and the "You" that can watch over the earth, over the nation. It is the "I/poet" and the "You/reader" that have the power to move away from the State-organized ontologies and into the individual, and then collectively organized ontologies, where the social welfare of the collectivity is at the forefront. Through such interrogation and awareness of oneself and the world it is then possible to move into ethically and collective oriented responsible ways of being.

As in other of his works, there is in *An African Eclipse* an emphasis by Chin Ce on personal engagement, an integrative cognizance and concern for the wellbeing of others and otherness--be it human, physical or transcendental entities and an exhibiting of the interrelationship between present, past and future. Humans appear as multidimensional entities that are tied with the larger spatio-temporal and

spiritual realities and therefore need to tap into those realities if they are to attain fecundity and fulfilment both as individuals and citizens of a true nation-state. As the poet says: “Only the soul /like dynamite /can burst the chain of ignorance” (45). *An African Eclipse* is thus a work that favours and calls for an ontology of holism and cooperation in the most varied sense of these terms.

One may further compare Chin Ce's philosophy or ethics of writing, his preoccupation with the Other, and his appreciation for fluid epistemologies, with Emmanuel Lévinas's ethical concerns. Like Ce, the Lithuanian-French philosopher, Lévinas, seems concerned with the mystical, fluid and poetic apprehension of life, and with the fundamental importance of an inter-relational ontology, the fundamental importance of the relationship between Self and Other, Self and Otherness. Both present the spiritual look, or the Soul as Ce might call it, as the method capable of overcoming restrictions, nihilistic categories and reductive subjectifications and objectifications that are the base of much distress and exploitation of humans by humans, of nature by humans. When reading Chin Ce, one can easily think of Lévinas's fascinating, if not enigmatic work, *Totality and Infinity* or even *Time and Other*. An in-depth and comparative study between the two authors will very likely constitute an interesting cross-cultural project.

### **Mind, Nature and the *Full Moon***

In his essay, “Closer to Wordsworth!: Nature and Pain in Chin Ce's Full Moon poems”, Kola Eke reasons that Chin



Ce's poetry is intrinsically animistic and romantic in a manner reminiscent of both William Wordsworth, and Leopold Senghor, one of the finest African poets of the Négritude movement. "With Chin Ce, nature and human mind are inseparable" (193), says Eke. One could easily add in an inflated metaphor: In Ce's poetry mind and nature are brother and sister, son and mother, wave and sea, reflector and reflected.

Chin Ce's poetry collection, *Full Moon*, is indeed full--full in the sense that it shows the deep relationship that exists between the state of the poet's mind and the state of his natural surroundings. The poet's mind becomes the mind of the nature, or even more, the mind of the cosmos, the mind of the beyond. To satisfy a visceral anthropomorphic and transcendental need, the mind of the poetic subject becomes the very being of nature, or the very being of the universe at large, with rivers and trees, boats and harmattan(s), suns and moons, clouds and skies (...) becoming mirrors of the deep sensibilities and desires of the poet, of his need to travel through the confines of time, space and material reality. The poet's fundamental, quasi-organic need (or requirement) is not just to merge with the terrestrial; it is also to merge with the extraterrestrial.

In Chin Ce's poetry, nature is not always the nice princess that can bring solace to the mind of the poet. Nature often shows how violent it can be, as violent perhaps as some tyrannical and corrupt governors of past or current Nigeria as the poem "The Call" alludes to:

Because I have seen how long lies the road

Beyond the setting minds of men

Because I looked past the hungers of today  
And drank some deep beyond the doctrines

I can look the raving tyrant in the eye  
And see the yawning emptiness of his glare...  
(15)

It is precisely because the poet has seen “beyond the setting minds of men,” “looked past the hungers of today” and “see[n] the yawning emptiness of [the tyrant's] glare” that he can exit his smallness, and the smallness and oppressive nature of his socio-political and material milieu and travel. His travelling allows him to meet the Soul, whose call he has heard:

Because I have heard the call of the soul  
That haunts my wild and restless mind

I shall forge along to build my dream  
On the hills beyond the rising sun (15)

Our poetic speaker is a “Journey man,” as he points out in another poem, “a traveller of the High way,” “the dream of silent night” (18), that “silent night” where the noise, the worries and the littleness of this world are annihilated or suspended. His ability to travel spiritually via what could be called the transit of poetic metaphor is what makes him a larger ontological being as illustrated in the capitalized poem “I AM” (16). His being becomes divine, cosmical, far exceeding the confines of the physical sphere.

Ce's poetry is profoundly beautiful and easy to the eye and to the mind. His language is generally not obscure; it possesses a pristine transparency that aligns itself with the poet's need to merge with the larger self. And furthermore, because of its foremost levity, it permits the reader to also share in the pleasure of the extra-terrestrial voyage that is the mind of the poet and enjoy, enjoy... As Wordsworth would say himself: "The Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion" (259).

Thus Chin Ce's poetry, like all powerful poetry, is a divine call, a profound yearning for wholeness in a world that has become too acquainted with the smallness of dissected disconnected particles. Ce's poetry is circular and round like the Moon when it is Full. Or like the revolving call of the wolf, who in his desperate and lonely night calls the 'lover' that he has lost and misses dearly. If the characters of *Children of Koloko* speak the language of loss, confusion and spiritual decadence, the shamanistic speaker of *Full Moon* utters the language of discoveries, enlightenment and transcendence.

### ***Millennial Disappointments and Renewals***

In a brief statement on *Millennial*, Chin Ce's third volume of poetry, Charles Smith notes that the poet-persona, having toured his neighbour-nations, returns to native land "with his usual ribaldry at the 'buffoonery of the millennium' which political leaders and heads of Nigeria represent" (202). *Millennial* is thus full of personal disappointments. The

haunting dirge tenor of most recent poetry from Africa still persists through a new craft that upholds the making of new friendships through journeys of the millennial dawn. It is however contended that this is a good indication that the personal introversion of the *Millennial* poems does not obscure the social commitment of Chin Ce's last collection of poetry. Smith declares:

*Millennial* will prove to be Chin Ce's most readable and intensely personal poetry, flowing with a maturity of craft that echoes previous sentiments while yet seeking those new 'vistas of illumination' that have become the recurring framework for the interpretation or appreciation of the works of Chin Ce. (204)

Yet, despite of all the millennial disappointments, the question that remains in *Millennial* is the question that permeates most, if not all, of Chin Ce's works: how to reach the 'season of another life'? And this question is reiterated in the poem "Millennial" once more as a powerful call to consciousness and awareness. The poem brings about, and in a profoundly mourning tone, the need to reform the individual and collectivity. It refers to that constant and haunting sentiment of the desire of the human soul, a soul that does not and must not leave the poet or the reader. The poem comes across as a call to not forget, a call to not let go -it is a call for the recuperation of ecological and human dignity, unity and higher awareness, a call for "God and Country" (197) as Smith puts it. This call, if heard and followed, is what will save the Nigerian citizen and allow him/her to attain full

BEINGNESS, a being concerned with and in touch with others--the human collectivity--but also with otherness: the earthly/ecological and spiritual collectivity. The awareness of these collectivities or entities will pave the way for that most waited and yearned for nation -the nation in the 'season of another life':

Sometimes you find me  
like a lone egret  
perched on some withered  
height

*Millennial* is a reminder that the time of the positive prophecy, the 'beautiful one', has not yet arrived.

...wondering what  
became of us  
that can no longer see  
with eyes that look at another's  
  
and the smile that stretches  
far and deep  
connecting souls

But it is also a reminder that that prophecy, that beautiful, lives in each of us, and it is as old perhaps as the human spirit; it is millenary, and it pounds in our hearts, it hounds us continuously, sometimes so much so, that You and I fall into convulsive crying, even though we might not consciously know the reason.

.....

Let not the world  
be a limpid cataract  
hounding its connoisseurs  
through but hollow destinies (50-3)

“Millennial” makes us think about that Beautiful confined to the minor hidden realms of ourselves, and it does so in a profoundly sad mournful manner, bringing to us feelings of deep regret, yearning and perhaps even tears. Yet, those very feelings evoked by the poem, awaken in us the renewed desire to uncover that very Beautiful. Let the world not be a limpid cataract. Let it BE. Because it hurts so much as it is. Here then is an adequate or appropriate index to our critical appreciation of the oeuvres of Chin Ce, a writer who, in most or all the opinions may likely remain the most significant voice of twenty-first century Nigerian and African writing.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Generally speaking language relativism refers to the idea that language molds the way we see reality and ourselves. Different languages emerge out of different socio-cultural, physical, ontological and epistemological environments and therefore each language will communicate something different. By creating new ways of communicating, the African-American slave is evading the white master's way of thinking, seeing, and ultimately, the power dynamics and discriminatory dichotomies that exist within the slave/master society. A new language signifies the negation of the white man's worldview, a negation of his values, legitimacy to

power and superiority it constitutes an annihilation of his claims. In a similar fashion, *écriture féminine* or *écriture au féminin* (feminine writing) as defined for instance by the French Hélène Cixous or the French Canadian France Théoret respectively, also evades the patriarchal power networks by refusing to obey conventional writings mechanisms and allowing the 'non-rational' intelligences to speak. For further discussions on the subject of language relativism, and *écriture féminine* or *écriture au féminin* see Ngũgĩ's *Decolonizing the Mind, Whorf's Language, Thought, and Reality*, Cixous's *La jeune née* and Théoret's *Entre raison et déraison*, respectively.

<sup>2</sup>For further discussions on the concepts of “overstanding” and “dread talk” see Velma Pollard's book *Dread Talk: The Language of Rastafarians*, J. Edward Chamberlin's *Come Back to Me My Language* and also my own article “Mia Couto and the Holistic Choric Self: Recreating the Broken Cosmic Order (Or: Relearning the Song that Truly Speaks...)” in *JALC* no. 4. This concept of “dread talk” is of course related to the concept of language relativism as referred to above (note 1) at least in the sense that the oppressed group (the slave or the woman) find it necessary to forge their own *sui generis* language to evade the oppressive systems that operate within their society or to access a mystical/non-man's 'land' that circumvents discriminatory categories.

<sup>3</sup>See for example Lispector's *Água Viva* and *A Hora da Estrela*, and Suzuki's *The Essentials of Zen Buddhism*.

<sup>4</sup>For an understanding of Foucault's thinking and his discussion on the construction of power, knowledge, truth and the 'making' of the subject via the various historical agents see *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. See also *The*

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