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The trilogy of love: Connecting the dots, re-enacting the love stories of Kofi Anyidoho and Atukwei Okai

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Abstract



This article explores the love stories in Kofi Anyidoho's two love poems, namely Do not Give too much of your Love to me and Murmuring, connect them to Atukwei Okai's love poem Rosimaya and hypothesizes that the poetic personae in these three poems unconsciously dialogue with one another. The article further posits that the three poems can be adapted and produced as a feature film or can be put on stage for dramatic performance.

Keywords: Dialogue, performance, drama, recital, theatre.

It is generally recognized that African oral poetry is performance based. According to Asangba (2016), African poetry mostly thrives more on performance. He further observes that in performing African poetry, the enactment is more of a community and inclusive presentation than singular presentation by an individual poet. He thus gives an example of the call and response mode of many African oral performances. Okon (2013) confirms Asangba's observation and puts forward that Anyidoho has popularized public poetry recitals in his performances by publicly performing his poems to the Ghanaian audience. Similar as Asangba and Okon, Selina (20015,p.143) avers that Kofi Anyidoho is a unique voice in African poetry who attempts to "perfect the performance mode of poetry from the dramatic oral roots." She further posits that Anyidoho's poetry is "best seen in performance" than reading.

In sum, what the above observations point out is that African poetry, for that matter poetry of Kofi Anyidoho, is performance-oriented and that it involves more than one person. These observations are true not only about Kofi Anyidoho, but also about other Ghanaian poets. Atukwei Okai is one of such poets in Ghana. Both Kofi Anyidoho and Atukwei Okai dramatize their poems in their recitals whenever the opportunity presents itself. Examples of such poems Atukwei Okai dramatizes are *Ayalolo Concerto*, *Lorgorligi Lorgarithms*, *Rosimaya* and *A Tender Homage to Noisy Poetry*. These poems are laden with a lot of charming dramatic scenes hence their performance by the author. *Seed Time*, *A Harvest of our Dreams*, *Do Not Give To Much of Your Love To Me*, *Murmuring*, *Tugbedzevi*, *Awoyo*, *Fertility Game*, *They Hunt the Night*, *Nunya* and *Tsitsa*, are some of Kofi Anyidoho's poems which are full of picturesque dramatic scenes hence their performance by the author.

While previous studies have spoken to the individual performances of the above poets in their recitals, little have been said about how their poems can be juxtaposed and connected to one another for stage performance, or to be screened as a feature film. It is against this background that this article seeks to put together and connect *Rosimaya*, *Do Not Give Too Much Of Your Love To Me* and *Murmuring* in order to show how these three poems unconsciously communicate with one another, hence, can be put together in a dramatic performance or in a feature film.

Content analysis is chosen as a technique for data analysis in this article. "Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inference from texts to the context of their use" (Krippendorff, 1989, p.18). This technique is employed in this article because it makes it possible to make an informed deduction after close reading of the three poems of our interest.

Reading Okai's love poem, *Rosimaya*, and Anyidoho's two love poems, *Do Not Give Too Much of Your Love To Me* and *Murmuring*, one thing stands out from the three poems. The two poets have unconsciously placed their poetic personae on a stage in a drama theatre or in a feature film to engage in a dialogue, pour their hearts out, and show the extent to which they feel about their love for one another.

The dialogue is first triggered in Atukwei Okai's *Rosimaya* where the persona, a male, bitterly laments the unreciprocated love he suffers in the hands of a lady, Rosimaya. A cursory first reading of the poem is very deceptive because of the captivating alliterations the persona uses in addressing Rosimaya. The alliterations render the poem so musical and so rhythmic to the extent that the first time reader may amazingly read on without paying attention to the real issues on the ground. All the stanzas in the poem easily and beautifully flow and run-on with a lot of admirable imageries. The poet's aptness in playing on words is so extensive and so infectious that one wishes to read on and on without stopping to find out about the devastating agony the gentleman experiences. *Rosimaya* is written in seven stanzas covering the seven days of the week. Each day the persona mentions in the poem recounts what Rosimaya does to hurt her lover as showcased in the various stanzas. Thus the first stanza (in appendix) starts with an awful scene where Rosimaya, who the gentleman addresses directly and refers to as "you", stones his "Saturdays", wastes his "Wednesdays" and tears "up" his "Tuesdays into two." Rosimaya goes on to "snare" the gentleman's "Sundays, squeeze" his "Saturdays, and toss" his "Tuesdays onto thorns." The verbs "stone", "waste", "tear up", "snare", "squeeze" and "toss" connote unpleasant activities unfolding in the gentleman's life. These unpleasant activities are the rejection and neglect he suffers in the hands of Rosimaya. The rejection and neglect are so enormous and devastating that he finds himself in a state of confusion hence tearing up "into two." Then, in his confusion, he finds himself tossed "onto thorns." The haphazard chronicling of the days of the week alone is enough to portray the confused state of the gentleman.

In the second stanza (in appendix) we see the gentleman accusing Rosimaya of being pretentious that "you forget my face." He thus plunges into a solemn prayer-like mood calling on God to salvage him from the embarrassing circumstances in which he finds himself. The gentleman subsequently asks Rosimaya two biting rhetorical questions as to "Why can't you tell/ Me/ You no more love/ Me?/ Or why not tell/ Me/ You can love me no/ More?"

Stanza three (in appendix) carries the same message as in stanza one. Here again the gentleman reiterates the maltreatments he suffers in the hands of Rosimaya purely because of the unflinching love he professes for her. Again, the persona uses disconcerting verbs such as "scorn", "freeze", "sink", "wet", "soil" and "milk" to drive home

the upsetting and discomfoting situation he finds himself every day of the week because of his unwavering love for Rosimaya.

Stanza four (in appendix), like stanza two, sees the gentleman revert to accusing Rosimaya for acting as if she has never been told by the gentleman to meet him at a particular point. Again, he resorts to his usual query as to “Why can’t you tell/ Me/ You never had loved/ Me?” or “You just will not love/ Me?” Right after asking these questions, he throws himself back into his usual sing-song complaints as found in stanzas one and three. So, in stanza five (in appendix), the gentleman again uses unsettling verbs such as “slash”, “teased”, “snub”, “mock”, “wreck” and “smother” to draw Rosimaya’s attention to how she has caused him, the gentleman, to be submerged in a state of disarray.

Stanza six (in appendix) comes along just as stanzas two and four. But this time the gentleman realizes his efforts will yield him nothing good in trying to win Rosimaya’s heart. The realities are too glaring to ignore since “He who sees not,/ Feels it on his skin.” Consequently, the gentleman painfully and regrettably realizes and appreciates the fact that there is completely nothing he can do about Rosimaya’s unfriendliness. He thus, in a resigned mood, begins sobbing agonizingly since “The terrible truth/ Is now like the sun/ where it is/ Not seen, it is felt.”

Stanza seven (in appendix) re-echoes stanzas one, three, and five but this time in a more subdued tone. The back and forth nature of the gentleman’s thoughts, and in voicing out his feelings, portrays the excruciating pain he goes through throughout the seven days in the seven stanzas; hence heaping “heavy sorrows/ Onto my soul.” The verbs “foul”, “starve”, “mess up”, “shun”, “maim” and “heap” portray how distraught the gentleman is.

Unfortunately for the gentleman, Rosimaya has not been a bit empathetic toward his plight when she, unconsciously, appears in Kofi Anyidoho’s poem *Do Not Give Too Much Of Your Love To Me* (in appendix). All along, Rosimaya stands cold and detached in Anyidoho’s poem, *Do Not Give Too Much of Your Love To Me*, watching the gentleman while he grumbles in Okai’s poem *Rosimaya*. She fails or refuses to rescue him from his despondency and rather firmly and in a-matter-of-fact tone sternly responds to the gentleman’s grumbling by declaring to him that, “Do not give too much of your love to me.”

Here, ‘Rosimaya’ admonishes the gentleman to not get too engrossed in and too obsessed with love for her. Rosimaya, in the first stanza, makes it clear to the gentleman that she has the desire and the passion for fashion and fancy, which she needs to accomplish:

I am the bird with voice of dreams
I bring the brief glory of wings upon the rays
Long ago I chose the rainbow for my soul

The word “bird” in this poem is an informal British old usage of the 1850s which connotes a young woman or a man’s girlfriend. In effect, the persona in *Do Not Give Too Much Of Your Love To Me* is a young woman; a girlfriend to the addressee who is a man in *Rosimaya*. This writer therefore takes this young woman as the Rosimaya in Okai’s poem *Rosimaya* since the poem *Rosimaya* in this write-up is put on the same stage with *Do Not Give Too Much Of Your Love To Me* on a drama theatre to be performed as a play. The young woman in *Do Not Give Too Much Of Your Love To Me*, ‘Rosimaya’, therefore cautions the ‘gentleman’ in *Rosimaya*, not to be too desirous of her and should not protest too much.

The line, “I am the bird with voice of dreams” is a declarative sentence giving direct message from Rosimaya to the gentleman. She is as much as to say, she is a young woman who has desires and aspirations; so she will not bring a long lasting pleasure to the gentleman, since she “brings the brief glory of wings upon the rays.” “Brief” in this line connotes shortness and not lasting. “Glory” connotes pleasure; “wings” connotes swiftness in movement; “rays” connotes the gleam of sunshine. Consequently, Rosimaya says she will only bring a shot, swift impermanent pleasure to the lover since she has long ago chosen the rainbow for her soul. “Rainbow” here in the last line of the first stanza connotes beauty and grandeur while “soul” connotes immortal spirit in human beings. The young woman is, therefore, saying that she has chosen beauty and grandeur for her immortal self hence the gentleman should not be too obsessed with his love for her since he, the gentleman, will not have her fully to himself.

The second stanza is very short but very incisive. It is two lines. This shows the brevity with which Rosimaya will treat the love relationship with the gentleman. Here, Rosimaya tells the gentleman that she is a woman on the move even though she knows the gentleman loves her dearly. She knows that the gentleman sincerely wants to have her for himself; yet she is not ready to settle with him. She further tells the gentleman that she knows that he has a very strong passion of love for her all his life; but there is nothing she could do about it because:

I am the bird in flight
the arrow through your night

The brevity in this stanza is very alluring since it portrays the fact that the young woman knows the effect her love has on the gentleman. "I am the bird in flight/ the arrow through your night" portrays the image of cupid, the Greek goddess of love, who throws arrows to hit the hearts of lovers with a pang. Since Rosimaya is aware of the pinch and pain of the arrow the gentleman is experiencing, she again emphasizes her admonishment in the first line of stanza three and tells the gentleman that "Do not give too much of your love to me."

In the third stanza, Rosimaya recounts a past event and warns that she once had a dreadful experience in the hands of an 'angel.' She indicates that at present she has overcome that dreadful experience and has now moved on in life leaving behind the harrowing incident.

Do not give too much of your love to me
Once the angels stole my cloth somewhere
upon the clouds in house of storms
Today I sweep the sky I leave footprints on thunderclouds
I spread the swift glory of wings upon the rays

The second line of this stanza gives us the *raison d'être* of why Rosimaya cautions the gentleman of giving too much of his love to her. She explains and reveals the traumatic experience she once had from someone she sees as an "angel" and trusts very much. The metaphor of "angels" here connotes persons of exemplary and virtuous disposition. But here are "angels" who "stole" her "cloth somewhere/ upon the clouds in house of storms." "Cloud" connotes gloom; "storms" connotes violence, "stole" is the simple past tense of steal which connotes the fact that Rosimaya's virginity had once been stolen by an 'angel' she trusted so much. The 'angel' seduced her and later broke her heart. Rosimaya thus seems to be saying that she had once been hurt by a person she trusted. But through a great effort she has been able to overcome the disaster; she is therefore not ready to trust anyone any longer. This may be why she keeps fervently repeating and warning the gentleman that, "do not give too much of your love to me" because she may not reciprocate it.

Mensah (2000) makes a very insightful analysis which is entirely different. While Mensah sees the speaker in *Do Not Give Too Much Of Your Love To Me* as "presumably male," this author sees the speaker as a young woman. Again while Mensah rightly argues that the persona "in the poem is himself a poet" (Mensah, 2000, p. 218) who is on a constant move all over the world, hence, it is unsafe for any woman to throw her heart out for

him, this article looks at it differently and argues that the persona is a young woman who has personal desires to pursue. In my view the young woman had once been hurt by someone, an “angel” she trusted so much. This is why she is no longer in any mood to give her heart to any man, let alone the gentleman in *Rosimaya*. Finally, while Mensah looks at the “bird” imagery as “...beautiful and gifted with song but always on the move” and sings of “dreams,” (Mensah, 2000, p. 218), to me the “bird” imagery connotes a young woman as far as informal British usage of the word is concerned.

In a nut shell, what this author seeks to confirm is that Atukwei Okai’s poem *Rosimaya* unconsciously dialogues with Kofi Anyidoho’s poem *Do Not Give Too Much Of Your Love To Me*, which also unconsciously responds to *Rosimaya*. This article posits that the *Rosimaya* in the poem *Rosimaya* is the respondent *Rosimaya* in the poem *Do Not Give To Much Of Your Love To Me*.

Again, the gentleman in the poem *Rosimaya*, and the lady *Rosimaya* who unconsciously appears in the poem *Do Not Give To Much Of Your Love To Me*, appear together in another Kofi Anyidoho’s poem, *Murmuring*, and stage a very glowing scene. Here, after the gentleman’s persistent pursuits, he is able to win *Rosimaya*’s heart. Having got what he wants, the gentleman becomes extremely overwhelmed and blinded with his love for *Rosimaya*. He thus forgets the admonishment she gave him earlier in *Do Not Give To Much Of Your Love To Me* to not give too much of his love to her. He therefore always follows *Rosimaya* wherever she goes. He is always criss-crossing her path. Then one deep night, the gentleman witnesses a scene and therefore, painfully laments in Kofi Anyidoho’s poem *Murmuring* thus:

I met a tall broadchest
strolling down deepnight
with my fiancée in his arms
She passed me off for a third cousin
on her mama’s side of a dried-up family tree
I nodded and walked away
murmuring unnameable things to myself

From the above poem we can see an extremely disheartened gentleman who finds his fiancée, *Rosimaya*, in the arms of a broad-chested man deep in the night. The description the disheartened gentleman gives the broad-chested man “strolling” with his “fiancée” deep in the night, paints a picture of a strong and fierce looking man. When the gentleman meets *Rosimaya* and the “broadchest”, she passes him off “for a third cousin/ on her mama’s side of a dried-up family tree. *Rosimaya* thus denies the gentleman and rather tells the “broadchest” that the gentleman is her distant cousin.

The denial of the gentleman by Rosimaya in front of the 'broadchest' and he, the gentleman, being introduced as a "third cousin" seriously hurts his ego. But he dares not utter a word of protest. He also dares not face up to the "broadchest", looking at his strong stature. He further dares not query Rosimaya's introduction let alone probing her for being with the "broadchest" at that unholy time of the night. This is because the gentleman fears that should he confront the "broadchest" or Rosimaya, he, the gentleman, would be given a dreadful beaten of his life.

This incident and scene looks very amusing but at the same time very pathetic. It looks amusing because here is a gentleman who would do anything at any time to always have his Rosimaya; but now he is speechless had only nodded his head and walked away. The way he "nodded and walked away", because he is likely afraid of the 'broadchest', is what amuses the audience. The pathetic part of the scene is when he begins "murmuring unnameable things" to himself. The gentleman is absolutely bewildered, bemused and panicky because of love and its intricacies. His situation is exceptionally pathetic because of the psychological trauma he suffers. It would therefore be a very great performance and spectacle if these three poems are acted on a stage or produced as a movie.

The central thesis of this article is that Atukwei Okai and Kofi Anyidoho's poems are inherently dramatic and can be taken individually and staged as plays in drama theatre. Their poems also dialogue with one another and thus can be arranged in such a way that their connection can tell a story. This article therefore connects the dots and avers that Anyidoho's two love poems, namely *Do Not Give Too Much Of Your Love To Me*, and *Murmuring*, unconsciously dialogue with Atukwei Okai's love poem *Rosimaya*. These three poems can therefore be adapted and produced as a play or a feature film that can be screened.

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Appendices

Rosimaya by Atukwei Okai

I
You stone
my Saturdays,
You waste
my Wednesdays
And tear up
my Tuesdays
Into two:
You snare
my Sundays,
You squeeze
my Saturdays,
And toss
my Tuesdays
Onto thorns

II

You feign

You feign

you

Feign

you forget my face

In even

The pious

Presence

Of God our God

The Father Almighty

The maker

Of heaven and earth.

Including all–

Even you and me,

Who today

Both hold on to worlds

As different

As the land from the

Sea.

Why can't you tell

Me

You no more love

Me?

Or why not tell

Me

You can love me no

More?

III

You scorn

my Sundays

You freeze

my Fridays.

And sink

my Saturdays
In a swamp:
You wet
my Wednesdays
You soil
my Saturdays
And milk
my Mondays
Of their mirth.

IV
You feign
you feign
you
Feign I
did not tell you
The time and
Place we were to meet;
But I know
I know I did tell you
You did
Repeat it yourself
My witnesses
Are your innocent
Ears, not your
Faithful tongue and eyes
Who'd also
Refuse to remember:
Why can't you tell
Me
You never had loved
Me?
Or why not tell
Me
You just will not love
Me?

V

You slash
my Saturdays
You teased
my Tuesdays.
And snob
my Sundays
In the sun;
You mock
my Mondays
You wreck
my Wednesdays
And smother
my Sundays
In the smoke.

VI

You feign
You feign
you
Feign you
do so love me
But the truth
Is now like the rain;
He who sees not,
Feels it on his skin.
And with
A deep paralysing pain,
Erodes away
The still wet-walls of
Our strong castles
Built in my dreams.
The terrible truth
Is now like the sun –
Where it is

Not seen, it is felt;
Skin of your words
Show a tell-tale tan,
Scales blinding
My eyes start to melt.

VII
You foul
My Fridays
You starve
My Saturdays
And mess up
My Mondays
In the mud;
You shun
My Saturdays
You maim
My Mondays
And heap heavy sorrow
Onto my soul.

Do Not Give Too Much Of You Love To Me by Kofi Anyidoho

Do not give too much of you love to me
I am the bird with voice of dreams
I bring the brief glory of wings upon the rays
Long ago I chose the rainbow for my soul

I am the bird in flight
the arrow through your night

Do not give too much of your love to me
Once the angels stole my cloth somewhere
upon the clouds in house of storms

Today I sweep the sky I leave footprints on thunderclouds
I spread the swift glory of wings upon the rays

O do not give too much of your love to me.

Murmuring by Kofi Anyidoho

I met a tall broadchest
strolling down deepnight
with my fiancée in his arms
She passed me off for a third cousin
on her mama's side of a dried-up family tree

I nodded and walked away
murmuring unnameable things to myself.

About the author

Paul Bingah is an English Language teacher at St Francis College of Education, Hohoe, Ghana. He is a Master of Philosophy in Literature student in the University of Ghana. He holds Bachelor of Arts in English with Linguistics from the same university. His research interests include Children's Literature and African Literature; particularly African Auto/biography and Life Writing. His rhyme book, *Rhymes for Early Childhood Development* is currently being used in schools. His poem, *Perhaps They Would Have To Be Told*, was published in *An Anthology of Contemporary Ghanaian Poems* (2004). He is currently working on a novel titled *Swooping from Afar*.