

**REVOLUTIONARY IMPULSE IN SELECTED POEMS
OF HOPE EGHAGHA**

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ABSTRACT

This study on “Revolutionary Impulse in Selected Poems of Hope Eghagha” explores the facets of psychological and revolutionary appeal on the oppressed masses in an effort to incite them to expropriate the expropriators in the society. The study is based on Eghagha’s *Rhythms of the Last Testament* (2002) and *Premonitions and Other Dreams* (2005). The study employs the theories of Psychoanalysis and Marxism to study the selected poems. As poet, Eghagha focuses on the social environment and how its structural composition affects various structural units in the society. For the poet, the structure of the society reflects oppression of the majority by the minority. His poetry consequently portrays various forms of social vices such as oppression, exploitation, corruption, injustice, insincerity, apathy, hypocrisy and betrayal, and presents them as driving forces to help the oppressed masses struggle for equitable distribution of resources. The study further demonstrates that this explicational approach facilitates access to the poet’s thematic foci which realize the immense constraints of society, and seek to use art as a revolutionary tool to salvage it. Equally, through the treatment of style – language, imagery and symbols, and graphological patterns -- insights are got on how the consciousness of the masses is shaped towards revolutionary action against social vices. The study discovers that the style of the poet is soused with the theme of revolutionary impulse which helps to bring out the exquisiteness in the poetry. Ultimately, the research concludes that a study of revolutionary impulse in the poetry of Eghagha could offer a revolutionary understanding and mindset to the poetry of most contemporary Nigerian poets.

Background to the Study

Revolution and Impulse

Revolution is one of the artistic intensifiers in African Literature. It continues to occupy a cardinal position in most African literary texts. Revolution is central to the formation of the modern egalitarian society. Different periods of history in different parts of the world have known and experienced revolution. The word “revolution” refers to radical, transformative change. As a socio- historical, economic and political process, Laura Neitzel avers that revolution is “a movement, often violent, to overthrow an old regime and effect complete change in the fundamental institutions of society” (1). *The Encyclopedia Americana*

correlates the idea of Neitzel. It refers to revolution as “a term used to designate a fundamental change in the government or the political constitution of a country mainly brought about by internal causes and effected by violence and force of arms on the part of a considerable number of individuals.”(455)

Consequently, revolution goes beyond mere change. Idaevbor opines that it includes “the fact that such a change in the political structure of a state has to come about through some violent response by the people to the conditions that impede their freedom.”(86) The idea of entrenching egalitarianism through violence is not only peculiar to Idaevbor. Leon Trotsky’s view is more obvious: “furnaces have to be hotter, wheels have to move faster, looms have to turn more quickly, schools have to work better” (3). Revolution in the effect of this cause becomes synonymous with the radical overcoming of the past, and modernity could thus only be achieved through such violent and total transformation.

Although revolution is not a new theme in artistic creation, its complexion in African literature continues to alter with the passage of time. Odile Cazenave argues that in “the late fifties and early sixties, ‘revolution’ meant colonial ‘revolution’, from repeated humiliations and denigrations to physical “revolution” and torture for the ones resisting colonial power ...” (59). But revolution in African literature today has assumed a new dimension. It is a departure from the initial tone. The forms of revolution in recent times are informed by the despoliation of the collective dreams of the African peoples by their governments.

Consequently, the dissatisfaction of the people continues to create cracks and tensions within the various nations in Africa. The inability of the government to caulk the cracks and level the rift between themselves and the ruled has made a revolution-ridden slum of Africa. The civil strife which erupts from the resistance and agitations of the people usually metamorphose into bloody civil wars such as the Nigerian-Biafran war, and at times assume genocidal proportions. The loss of faith in government by an alienated people continues to find a looming space in African literature. The images in the poetry of Eghagha reflect the realities of this loss of faith which inevitably act as driving forces for revolution.

But this is not to state that African people are violent people and African geographical space labeled by violent tremors. Rather, it emanates from the agitations of the people in their responses to societal ills such as oppression, tyranny, corruption, insincerity, injustice and marginality occasioned by the egocentrism and depravity of the government. Since literary artists are taken to be in open partisanship with the oppressed masses in the existing intra-class schism, they are not left out in these agitations. Usen holds that “Literary writers have consistently addressed their works to the historical, social, political and economic problems of their societies. Nigerian writers are not left out ... since they operate in an oppressive system, their works are preoccupied with themes of racism, protest, conflicts and violence.” (106)

When revolutionary impulse is thus crystally inherent in Nigerian literary works such as in the poetry of Eghagha under study, it is just a response to socio-economic ills which inexplicably translates into violence and optimistically charts a better societal reality.

The inspiration for many 20th and 21st century revolutions is the Russian Revolution of 1917 led by Vladimir Lenin and inspired by the ideas of Marxism. To move societies from one historical stage to the next, Marx believes that revolution is necessary. His formulation strengthened the perception of revolution as a universal and inevitable process in world history. The impulse for revolution seems therefore to be rooted in this Marxist belief and ideology. The word “impulse” designates a sudden strong urge or desire to act. As a psychological process, *The Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia* defines it as “a wish or urge,

particularly a sudden one”. Equally, *The Microsoft Encarta 2009*, refers to impulse as a “sudden wish or urge that prompts an unpremeditated act or feeling”. What is obvious is that impulse is a driving force that stirs and catapults people into action especially, unplanned one. Impulsive feelings are linked to the Freudian theory of the three elements of personality which are the id, the ego and the superego. These elements are reservoir for the unconscious and the conscious which can be personal or collective. The id constitutes elements of instinctive drives, the superego acts as an internal censor that causes us to moral judgement in the light of social pressures and the ego mediates between the instinctual drives of the id and the demands of social pressure issued by the superego. The poetry of Eghagha awakes these feelings and thus incites and initiates a revolutionary process.

For over half a century, the Russian Revolution provided impulse for revolutionaries around the globe with a model for political and socio-economic transformation. Trotsky was thus right when he argues that “The social whirlpool will not calm down so soon. There are decades of struggle ahead of us in Europe and America. Not only the men and women of our generation, but of the coming one will be participants, its heroes and its victims.” (6)

The continuation of this social whirlpool is evident in the anti-colonial and nationalist revolutions that took place in China, Vietnam, America and parts of Africa. It would therefore not be out of context to state that the social whirlpool has not calmed down till present day as obvious instances of this abound in such societies like Egypt, Libya and Nigeria.

Revolution and Art

Literature and revolution have had an outstanding historic synergy. Armah aptly explains that

the world’s oldest literature (written by Neferti) speaks of revolutionary changes in social, economic and political structures in a language that is as unambiguous as, though more refinedly poetic than, Marx’s explosively alliterative ‘expropriation of the expropriators’.(496)

Below is an excerpt from Neferti:

I show you the land in turmoil,
What should not be has come to pass.
Man will seize weapons of warfare,
The land will live in uproar.
Men will make arrows of copper,
Will crave blood for bread,
Will laugh aloud at distress.
None will weep over death,
Each man’s heart is for himself.
Mourning is not done today,
Hearts have quite abandoned it.
A man sits with his back turned,
While one slays another.
I show you the son as enemy, the brother as foe,
A man slaying his father. (qtd. in Armah 496)

In the above, Neferti aptly captures the disintegration of the society. Socialism has vanished and individualism has taken over the day to the extent that “each man’s heart is for himself”. This results in oppression and other forms of brutality targeted on the lower class of the society. Neferti refers to this as “craving blood for bread and laughing aloud at distress”.

Neferti thus argues that what hitherto was inconceivable has come to pass and consequently plunged society into unexpected turmoil. Before the Russian Revolution, the role of the Decadent and Symbolic Schools of the 1907-1908 was differentiated and individualized in the bourgeois sense of the terms. But the revolution made the process end patriotically. Trotsky explains that the revolution which overthrew the bourgeois burst into literature:

...this is especially true of literature...our revolution is the expression of the peasant turned proletariat...our art is the expression of the intellectual...it consists in the separation created by bourgeois society of intellectual work excluding art from physical work, and it appears that the revolution is the work of men doing physical work.(4)

What becomes obvious is that one of the ultimate aims of revolution is to overcome completely, the separation of intellectual work, excluding art, from physical work. Excluding art because the artist swings between the two but gravitates more towards the peasant. In the preface to *Rhythms of the Last Testament*, Eghagha espouses that because of entrenchment of perpetual injustice, the power of the written word must be used to testify against the apes in power even in the face of letter bombs:

The atrophy which we encounter daily ... makes us to search for the soul of things, for restoration ... and so we catch the written word and wield its power even in the face of letter bombs ... it is a testament told with music and dance. But the dance must wreck havoc and the music must be discordant even as the drummers call for a new song, which they can interpret. (7)

Eghagha envisages a different dance; a revolution, which is different from the existing dance so that the drummers will call for a new song which they can dance but it will not come. According to Eghagha, the essence of the discordant music is to “heal the broken soul, mend the potholes which their (the apes) policies have inflicted on the land” (7).

What is expressed in Eghagha above is a definitional statement of impulse for revolution. This ideology runs throughout his art. It arises from the realization that, to borrow Odua Ofeimun’s words: “the guilty are too well-fed to pass/ through the needle’s eye of his scorn” (“A footnote 11”, *The poet* 30). Furthermore, Catherine Acholonu reinforces that such too well-fed have taken “too much, far too much/ and now the owners have noticed” (“The Rain Maker”, *Nigeria* 78). Those who are guilty of various injustices in the society must therefore realize that it is time to seek the pleasures of the masses or they must be shown, to corroborate Aiyejina, that “...when rodents destroy crops and hide out in holes, they should be smoked out for judgement” (“If a Star”, *A Letter* 15).

The impetus for creating a revolutionary transformative art thus proceeds from the fundamental problem of constructing an egalitarian culture in the society. Rivera and Breton explain that in doing this, the artist enters into a natural alliance with revolution: “...revolution is not afraid of art. It realizes that the role of the artist in a decadent capitalist society is determined by the conflict between the individual and various social forms which are hostile to him. This fact alone, in so far as he is conscious of it, makes the artist the natural ally of revolution.” (1)

This art, as it seems, needs collective consciousness because revolution starts from the central idea that collective man must become sole master and that the limits of his power are determined by his knowledge of natural forces and by his capacity to use them. This new art, Trotsky further adds “is incompatible with pessimism, with skepticism, and with all the other forms of spiritual collapse”. Trotsky further maintains that the art “is realistic, active, vitally collectivist and filled with a limitless creative faith in the future” (6).

It is therefore absurd to conceptualize that art would remain indifferent to the convulsions of each epoch. Art, directly or indirectly, affects the lives of the people who make or experience the events at a particular point in time. Again, Trotsky contends that “a profound break in history, that is, a rearrangement of classes in society, shakes up individuality, establishes the perception of the fundamental problems of poetry, from a new angle, and so saves art from eternal repetition”(4). The realistic, active and vitally collectivist impulse for revolution in the poetry of Eghagha are vivid attestations from a new angle (Nigeria) of how art reflects the lives of a people in a particular society at a particular time. The poetry of Eghagha reflects murderous attitudes towards crimes that militate against oppressed people in the society. In doing this, Kathleen Greenfield’s argument that the pen could be a mightier force than the sword vindicates Eghagha:

...pens should be used to increase the anxiety of all oppressive regimes. At the very least the pen should be used to murder their crimes against the people and making them know that they are being seen. The pen may not always be mightier than the sword, but used in the service of truth, it can be a mighty force. (27)

It is thus a poetry that presupposes that the revolution for contemporary Nigeria embodies the re-organisation and the re-structuring of the Nigerian mind and intellect. It is a revolution of conscience and consciousness to completely overhaul the thinking process and the value mechanism of the Nigerian to the extent that he will re-asses his values and re-order his priorities. Suffice it to say that the revolutionary impulse in the poetry of Eghagha, to borrow Eugene Ionesco’s expression, strives always “to change the world” (767).

Scope of the Study

Hope Eghagha belongs to the new and rising voices of Nigerian poets. He has written six (6) anthologies of poetry which include *Rhythms of the Last Testament* (2002), *This Story must not be Told* (2003), *The Governor’s Lodge* (2004), *Premonitions and other Dreams* (2005), *Mama Dances into the Night* (2007) and *Pepper in my Throat* (2007). However, the present study focuses on *Rhythms of the Last Testament* and *Premonitions and other Dreams*. Eghagha’s well crafted poetry represents a consistent and unflinching tone, vision and temperament to give identity and authority to the poetry of the Nigerian rising voices. “The House”, “The Democrats”, “Hunger and Anger”, “Clothes of nakedness”, “Sand-bars”, “The Song”, “In the dock”, “Dangerous driving”, “The Prelude” and “The Last Lover” are Eghagha’s poems to be studied. These poems are hypothetically assumed to be in streamline with the discordant and trenchant revolutionary impulse of the poet. Apart from thematic concerns, the study equally focuses on language and style of the poet and how his poetry help to instigate the masses, especially the oppressed ones in the Nigerian society to witch-hunt any form of non-egalitarian culture.

Textual Explication

In his poetry, Eghagha exhibits increasingly in the psyche of the oppressed masses, impulsive expressions of threat and revolution through the wielding and deployment of appropriate inciting words and situations. In the preface to *Rhythms of the Last Testament* (2002), Eghagha states his objective:

Poverty and neglect travel hand in hand like twin brothers. The ‘lack’ or ‘absence’, which has become a recurring decimal gives us a wailing tune in the jungle of the times.... And so we catch the written word and wield its power, even in the face of letter bombs ... it is a testament, told with music and dance. But the dance must wreck havoc and the music must be discordant.... (7)

Eghagha's aim is not just to capture and present the sordidness of the society in order to amuse those who read the poetry, but with the objective to make the people see the dirt and the pain around them so that they can adequately respond and react to it. In one of his anthologies, *Pepper in my throat* (2007), he succinctly holds that "Revolutions don't come with love poetry how can I sing love songs when the homestead totters from the oppression of ravaging poverty inflicted by the beauty of their ancient lies." (71)

Obviously, Eghagha's poetry is a panache for spinning yarns of revolutionary appeal using images and symbols that confront the human psyche through ferocious and visceral descriptions. Ifemesia Iferenta further avers that

In a sadistic society where oppression, deprivation and dehumanization form the bulwark of society's super-structure, it is balmy and distastefully defeatist for an artist to recoil into an indifferent shell of creative fantasy, celebrating Art-for-Art's sake; that the artist cannot write or sing about mushy love songs or scripts when his immediate surroundings are engulfed in a conflagration. The artist's sublime task is to put out the pillaging flames first: then later, as a form of catharsis, he can write queasy love ditties to his estranged heart throb. (18)

Thus, like Ofeimun, Eghagha "nudges and awakens them/ that sleep/ among my people into action" ("Prologue", *The Poet Lied* 1). And as Aiyejina equally opines "... to ask the right question in a season of fear and lurking death is a revolutionary gesture" (127). The above obviously vindicates Eghagha in the words of Shadrack Ambanasom, in *Pedagogy of the Deprived* when the latter holds that the role of the artist is "the education of the masses especially the oppressed masses in such a way that they become imbued with a heightened sense critical consciousness" (242).

Eghagha's creation of a heightened and revolutionary consciousness in the oppressed masses is seen in the forms of revolutionary impulse inherent in his poetry. His revolutionary poems are never love poems. Rather, they are poems perpetually barbed with bullets to arm the oppressed reader to transform his assumed ill-fated destiny. Eghagha's poems that encapsulate forms of revolutionary appeal on the oppressed masses will further be analyzed under various sub-headings.

Betrayal and Apathy

In "The House", Eghagha portrays the betrayal and apathy of leaders in the images of decay and disorganized society. In stanza one, the poet reveals the depth of rottenness of the society:

the hollow house stands inside
howling
depths of sacred sand
not even that can save it.

(*Premonitions* ... 13)

The above picture of rot and decay in the polity challenges the impulse of the reader for revolution. Honesty is least on the minds of the leaders and of course, greediness permeates their psyche thereby betraying the mandate given to them by the people. In the last two lines of the first stanza, Eghagha believes that the problem of society can no longer be solved by supplications to any *deus ex machina*. He believes that the rescue must come from the people because

Its builders build with

A wish of self-ownership
Fetching rotten woods

From the forest for the foundation ...

Howling madness. (*Premonitions* ... 13)

Eghagha holds that this rescue can only be provided if the oppressed masses are aware of the conditions under which they live and the fact that they can, with their hands bring about necessary changes. The oppressed masses are condemned to a society; a house where the foundation is laid on “rotten woods” just because of the dubious nature of selfish leaders who only howl madness. The poet believes that the masses must reject those who howl this madness and their ordinances. To do otherwise would be to mortgage the society and set it for total destruction. In a society where there is a clear collaboration between selfish, corrupt and oppressive leaders to the detriment of society’s collective existence, the mere presentation of the fact is meant to achieve only one objective which is the mobilization of the people, especially the oppressed against the thieves and those who support them. The import of Eghagha’s impulsive statement in the poem is sensitively confrontational. The apathy of the leaders evident in images of hollowness, decay and rottenness of the house and its foundation becomes eternal driving force to revolutionize the society from what seems inevitable crumbling.

In “Clothes of nakedness”, Eghagha initiates a creative struggle by the masses against the forces of oppression symbolized in his Marxist conception of the bourgeois class in the society. The poem brings to fore the deceitful nature of the leaders. In the first stanza, Eghagha writes:

when you get there
ring the bell Aruedon
come to seek the goons
whose zealousness
cut off the straps
of your belt. (*Rhythms* ... 15)

The above lines aptly capture the mutilated and fraudulent zeal of the ruling class. It is a zeal that appeals to the masses; to all, to be transparent and honest. But what happens to the proponents of this nakedness? The next lines reveal:

when you return
what shall you see

they wear the clothes now
those men
who swore that nakedness
is purity. (*Rhythms* ... 15)

Eghagha’s honest commitment is to expose the continued enslavement of the masses seen in the betrayal and apathy of the leaders. Bamikunle makes this obvious when he states that “The privileged class ... often falsify history to support their exploitation of the people and almost always found a kind of literature to support and propagate the false concept of history on which the exploitation of the people is based.” (41)

But Eghagha like other Marxists has seen as Ngugi rightly explains: “the workings of justice in a social system whose base is capitalism ... they have witnessed mercenaries, coups and

they know that Macbeth's bloody dagger is not a figment of imagination from the heated brains of starry-eyed idealists ("The Power of Words ..." 480).

In the last stanza, the poet-persona thus cries out against corruption and dishonesty that entangle society and the oppressed:

they buy mills of them
from hospital allocations
the victims
are felled like ripe seeds
each morning
before the news
yet they call us brothers
these patriots (*Rhythms ...*15)

In the above lines, Eghagha makes prominent the synthesis between poetic truth and reality. Normally, sequel to news each morning, listeners are overwhelmed with obituaries. Eghagha sees these deaths as avoidable because allocations meant for social facilities like good hospitals are diverted to selfish ventures. Eghagha's rhetorical outcry for justice corroborates that of Shakespeare in *King Lear*:

How many ages hence
shall this our lofty scene be acted over
in states unborn and accents yet unknown. (qtd. in
Ngugi 480)

The heat from this outcry is revolutionary. He implores the masses to rise in historical struggle for the positive alteration of their consciousness and themselves. Eghagha presupposes that the "wretched of the earth" and the "God's bits of wood" must indicate significantly that they no longer wish to be the door-mat of financial overlords. In doing this, his poetry, to corroborate Ngugi, thus aims at creating

Positive heroes from among the working people, positive heroes who would embody the spirit of struggle and resistance against exploitation and naked robbery by the national bourgeoisie and its global allied classes. (*Writers ...* 24)

Consequently, for Eghagha, the need for revolutionary change encapsulates a collaborative action. Amuta explains that "the alliance would include the urban proletariat, urban poor students, progressive intellectuals, the peasantry, progressive army cadres, progressive women's organizations etc" (509). He further explains that "taken together, this group constitutes, in a demographic and political sense, the vital majority who are carrying the burden of ... capitalist exploitation..." ("Marxist Aesthetics ..." 509) in the society. Eghagha's "Clothes of nakedness" therefore, through vivid exposition of capitalist exploitation, desires the masses to wake into class confrontation as a means of achieving lasting freedom for the society.

In "Dangerous driving", Eghagha makes a comparison between the reckless drivers found on the roads and the nation's reckless drivers. The first stanza paints a gory image of the state of roads and how it affects the masses:

reckless drivers drive on drained roads
the drainages do not drain the roads
the road makers recklessly drain the till
in the name of road reconstruction
homes are drained of lives in livid carnages. (*Premonitions ...* 35)

The above is a normal experience on the roads of societies such as Nigeria. The road makers recklessly and hurriedly construct roads which send so many people especially, the oppressed masses to untimely graves. From this normal but distasteful experience, the poet makes vivid rhetoric comparison in the next stanza: “whose weapon is more fatal/ the dangerous road driver/ the nation’s reckless drivers” (*Premonitions ...35*). The poet weighs the fatality of the weapons carried by the two drivers. Invariably, Eghagha ascribes the etiology of whatever happens on the roads to the nation’s reckless drivers because:

the drivers of the land’s lorry
sit in the warm comfort of aeroplanes
asking exhorting the passengers
to be faithful in tax payment. (*Premonitions ... 35*)

The above lines reveal the apathy of the leaders to the plight of the masses. Otherwise, how can a lorry driver drive from the comfort of an aero plane? The leaders create dichotomy between themselves and the ruled. They build nests from where they “elicit a strident blood call” (*Premonitions ... 35*). The effects of this call are like Shylock’s pound of flesh because:

the land is in earthquakes
the road has become worn with thorns
a sentinel is called an old thief
and the cobra spits poison

the wig and the gown eat more dollars. (*Premonitions ... 35*)

The deplorable state of the society seen in the effects is poignantly alarming. The watchman becomes an old thief and while the “cobra spits poison”, the judiciary indulges in corruption; “eats more dollars”, as the masses eat poison. Eghagha holds that these fraudulent practices are perpetrated “on the road to conspiracy” (*Premonitions ... 35*). The revolutionary appeal in the poem intensifies when

the sentinel has proved his meeting
the canon is the sentinel’s
the boom boom boom
bangs the baggage of the bagman
it cracks the steel of the chairman
and there are a million holes
on the enclosed steel house

it is an accord between the nest and the rest.
(*Premonition ... 35*)

Like most contemporary poets, the intensity of revolutionary temper and appeal expressed by Eghagha is profusely shocking. Onwudinjo avers that “the increasing revolutionary tones of contemporary ... poets is an index of the tension and heat building up in society against the innumerable contradictions, frustrations and dilemmas of ... misrule and outright tyranny.” (162)

The sentinel is a metaphorical representation of the masses who suffer the effects of the dangerous driving. But the sentinel’s canon is a weapon to end the dangerous driving. It is a revolutionary gesture to perpetually crack the steel house which barricades the oppressed masses and the leaders. Eghagha, like Ousmane in “Fingers” thus urges the masses: “let us join our fingers to take away/all the power of their finger/which keeps humanity in mourning” (qtd. in Ngugi “The Power of Words...” 482). Eghagha’s “The House”, “Clothes

of Nakedness” and “Dangerous Driving” are poems eliciting revolutionary appeal to end leadership betrayal and apathy on the society.

Leadership Injustice and Brutality

In “The Song”, “Sand-bars” and “In the dock”, Eghagha exposes and presents leadership injustice and brutality as revolutionary appeal to educate and help the oppressed masses fight for their rights in the society in order to remove the yoke of oppression placed on them. In “The Song”, he raises a song to awaken the impulse of the masses into revolutionary action. In the first stanza, Eghagha is quite sure that the revolt song will be violent:

i shall raise a song
in the armpit of Abaji
this lambaste
shall open the womb of death
home to raping phallus. (*Rhythms ...12*)

In other words, the song raised by Eghagha is a metaphor for revolution arising from what injustices and evil he perceives in the society. This is made obvious in stanza two:

... I see flowing-apparel men
at desks overflowing with oil
they bark orders
they ban others
they create organs
organs of orgy
to tie up our tongues. (*Rhythms ... 12*)

The import of the above lines is not only felt in the conveyance of acute class stratification. It is a pictorial portrayal of a situation where the privileged are not only enjoying what was meant for everybody but employing brutality to shut any opposition. But Eghagha recognizes the power in number. He does not ask the people to seek divination at the shrine of any oracle but to rise-up and untie their tongues. This is the same view as Shelly expresses in his poem, “The Mask of Anarchy”, when he admonishes the people to

rise like lions after slumber
in unvanquishable number:
shake your chains to earth, like dew
which in sleep had fallen on you
ye are many, they are few! (qtd. in Ushie 96)

Like Shelly, Eghagha is aware of the power of the majority. Stephen Ingle has equally argued along similar line that “for any revolution to succeed, the support of the majority is essential ...” (192). Furthermore, Charles Tilly dwells on collective action all through his book. Idaevbor writes that

In “Bata”, he (Tilly) tells us that if we do not check the excesses of our kings, the tendency is that they would forget their people and “fatten into a snore”. Bata drums put the people on the alert. When the drums echo, you can hear the dead awakening, jolting age-grades from amnesia and tattoos making warriors from merchants, blacksmiths from nomads. (qtd. in Idaevbor 97)

Eghagha advocates vigilance on the part of the masses to ensure that those who preside over the affairs of the society are never permitted to cross-carpet between just leadership and oppression. In the last stanza, Eghagha is optimistic that if the leaders dare to compromise justice with evil, the revolution from the masses will always be dreadful:

when the sky collapses
may it land on the empty heads
of tall crooked men
who play ping pong
with human lives. (*Rhythms ... 12*)

“Empty heads” is a realistic reference to what obtains in the politics of most developing countries such as Nigeria. It typifies a situation where majority of those who occupy positions of political power are not qualified to occupy such positions. They rig elections and employ other crude means at their disposal in order to be in power. This is the reason why Eghagha prays the sky to fall on the “empty heads” of unjust leaders because they play games with human lives. The poem’s revolutionary impulse is thus shockingly appealing. Its precautionary appeal on the other hand is exquisite. The collapsing of the sky is a metaphor for the poet’s envisaged revolutionary transformation of society. In addition, the landing of the sky on the empty heads of tall crooked men optimistically represents the end of injustice and brutality enshrined in the Marxist tone of the poem. Soyinka, in the same spirit states that “... scotching the snake before it had time to strike” (22) is a necessity, for if the snake is allowed to grow, it will definitely become a danger to the people. Invariably, Eghagha’s “The Song” serves as a driving force to nudge the oppressed masses into revolutionary action whenever they are threatened by unjust leadership. The poem equally challenges the leaders to protect the interest of the ruled at all times.

“Sand-bars” is an acute metaphor for the villains of society’s harmonious existence. The conspicuous free verse structure of the poem lends credence to the poet’s free flow of thoughts and allows outpouring of the poet’s yearning for a better society. The first seven lines of the poem reveal the nature of the sand-bars:

sand-bars green floods
hallelujah to sand-bars
sand-bars
sand-bars dam floods
hallelujah to the messiah
sand-bars huge monstrous
gobbling men of chests. (*Rhythms ... 17*)

The symbolic references to “green floods”, “dam floods”, “huge monstrous gobbling men of chests” make concrete the nefarious consciousness of the upper class of the society. Equally, Eghagha satirically refers to them as “messiahs” and consequently, there are shouts of hallelujah to the messiahs; to the saviours who bar the dreams of the oppressed masses, who hold the society to perpetual enslavement. The next lines make more obvious these effects:

sand-bar bars us
from flooding the city
with freshness
sand-bars block us
from our dreams
locked in the hearts of martyrs. (*Rhythms ... 17*)

Eghagha’s exposition of these effects attests to his commitment to help organize the masses to articulate agitations for a better society by showing them the conditions in which they live. Eghagha holds that the leaders bar the masses from flooding the society with freshness. They bar the masses from realizing this dream and as a result, many have died with this dream locked in their hearts. But Eghagha challenges the oppressed masses with the reasons why their living conditions are precisely as they are and lead them to always discover that they

have the only real possibility of changing these conditions. In the next lines, he thus prays the masses:

let us shout no hallelujahs
to the sand-bars
of our land

sand-bar?
sand-bar
 sand-bars
the sound of barristers
offer no hope
to men gripped by sand-bars

sand-bars
sand-bars?
we need them no more
let the floods come wash anew. (*Rhythms ... 17*)

Eghagha's Marxist call on the masses to shout no hallelujahs to the sand-bars is obviously a form of revolutionary appeal. His awareness of the dilemmas of the masses as a result of tyranny is central to the revolutionary motif and impulse in his poetry. Eghagha, in the above lines holds that even negotiations "the sound of barristers/ offer no hope". Thus, in the last two lines, he sees no need for the sand-bars and not only implores the oppressed to revolt but is optimistic that the inevitable revolution will restore freshness to the society. This forms the core of revolutionary force in the poem. "Sand-bars" therefore attests to Eghagha's ability to adequately distinguish the multifarious nature of injustice and brutality and his readiness to take a radical posture.

"In the dock" pays a passionate tribute to the extra-judicial and tragic killing of Ken Saro Wiwa and the eight Ogonis during the regime of Abacha. Again, Eghagha brings to fore the relationship between poetic truth and reality. Eghagha writes:

guilty
the opaque voice
the wigged kangaroo
judgement
delivered Pilate again
yet the nine men
must go into the dungeon
must go into the dark riverside
home to shark-crocodiles

sunday
angelus washed the wig anew. (*Rhythms ... 13*)

Onwudinjo explains that "although poetic truth does not necessarily correspond with historical truth, certain allusions ... are made to identifiable historical facts and figures" (151). In the above poem, the reference to "pilate", "nine men", and "shark-crocodiles" parallels tragic death toll of innocent citizens particularly, the hanging of the nine Ogoni men without trial by Abacha. The judicial system becomes non-transparent. Thus, like the Biblical Pilate, it delivers innocent citizens into dungeon, into dark rivers where Abacha's

crocodiles devour them. And in the last two lines, the robes of the judges are washed anew just as Pilate washed his hands after condemning innocent Christ to death on the cross.

Eghagha expresses his sensibility of societal tragedy in images of deprivation, brutality and death. Against this backdrop, Onwudinjo argues that “indeed, the dividing line between poetic and historical truth grows very thin” (154). The poet perceives the presence of injustice and oppression in the society as a jinx which must be broken. In expressing disgust with the leadership of leaders, particularly, the military, Eghagha advocates revolt against the oppressors. “The Song”, “Sand Bars” and “In the Dock” are thus poems testifying that continued injustice and brutality by leaders will continue to appeal to the masses to perpetually embark on revolutionary action.

Hypocrisy and Marginalization

In other poems such as “The democrats”, “Hunger and Anger” and “The last lover”, Eghagha portrays hypocrisy and marginalization and presents them as revolutionary appeal. In “The democrats ...”, he exposes the disdainful nature of those in the parliament. It is a pathetic picture of mindless infliction of pain in the society. In the first stanza, Eghagha opines that

Parliament is in their hands
legislators have eaten the pounding pestle
they cannot sit on the chairs
across the road there are toads
parliament is up for sale to parliament
legislation is up for sale to the democrats
the legislators are up for sale to the lions
Ijelekpo
parliament
O parliament
our parliament of pristine palliatives
where is the moral armour of the gavel. (*Premonitions ... 25*)

Eghagha avers that parliament is in the hands of the democrats. But he quickly adds that they have eaten the “pounding pestle” and because of that, they cannot sit; they cannot legislate for the good of society. They only fight or legislate jumbo allowances to themselves to the detriment of the masses. This is why the poet equally calls them “lions” because they invariably feed on the people’s flesh and blood. The poet satirically refers to them as immaculately clean and unused, alleviating pain without curing. In the last line of the above stanza, the poet questions their consciousness and judgement.

In the next stanza, the lust for blood and meat by the democrats intensifies as
the flaming lion has held up ligaments for the
legislators
the decrepit pieces are aloft in the sacred chambers
they are thirsty for blood meat water
they tread on scattered decomposing cadavers
the hollowed becomes hollow in hope
they open the hole in the face for the meat
their eyes are shut, shut from the shoes of truth.
(*Premonitions ... 25*)

The above lines convey acute inhumanity to fellow man. The masses are marginalized consequent on the hypocritical attitude of the leaders. The democrats, the lions, now march on corpses while the hope of the already downtrodden becomes empty. Consequently, in the

last line of the stanza, the poet sees their vision as myopic from the path of truth. In the next stanza, the poet holds that the democrats only make laws that “hold the land in the cesspit of time” (*Premonitions ... 25*). This is because “parliament and the lions eat the same meat / parliament executes the projects / parliament eats up the projects” (*Premonitions ... 25*). The poet is of the view that the society has been thrown into a cesspool because of the selfish legislation of the democrats. The democrats, by awarding projects to themselves which are never executed or never well executed have plunged society into stagnation.

Against this backdrop, Eghagha in the last stanza pings the masses into revolutionary action. In line with his Marxist commitment, he tells the oppressed masses: “let us hold parliament we the people/ parliament vanishes when/ the people are no parliamentarians” (*Premonitions ... 25*). The anger and revolutionary appeal on the oppressed masses in the above lines is obviously inciting. The poet’s revolutionary mission, as captured in these lines is unmistakable. He believes that the people must be encouraged to wrest their future that is couched in promises that have never materialized. He implores the masses to unite in order to confront the oppressors with battle plans and marching songs. This is because the oppressed that seek freedom must be ready to take it. He believes that the people are the right parliamentarians and there can be no parliament if the people are relegated and wished-away. In the same sense, Fredrick Douglas holds that

If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favour freedom, and yet depreciate agitation are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground. They want rain without the awful roar of its many waters. (qtd. in Udenta IV)

Precisely, the point here is that the oppressor would never let off a victim if he is complacent and waits for the day God would hear his cry.

Eghagha believes that freedom can only come about through force. This view was earlier expressed by Fanon. Fanon is of the view that for a people to be liberated, they must be ready to use “... all means, and that of force first and foremost” (48). Ngugi is even more trenchant. He posits that “violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery, it purifies man” (*Homecoming* 28). Equally, Nelson holds that “the right and duty of the oppressed to go against his oppressor is unquestionable” (21). From the foregoing, Eghagha does not just present the nefarious acts of the democrats with the objective of celebrating the marginalization and suffering of the poor and powerless in the society, but with the aim of mobilizing the oppressed masses to resist the powers that be from visiting further pain on them. Egudu thus observes of the poets of Eghagha generation that theirs is “... a poetry of comprehensive human concern and mass mobilization. It exhorts the leaders and enlightens the followers; it warns the strong and empowers the weak” (“Power and Poverty” 79). Eghagha’s vision and belief in mobilizing a people for revolution thus underscores the realistic presentation of life in his poetry.

“Hunger and anger” is another poem that unequivocally arouses the impulse of the masses into revolutionary action. In stanza one, the poet recounts the normal experience of a hungry person which ordinarily saddens and angers the whole being:

anger and hunger are brothers
this is the sad song of the stomach
when the bees of hunger sting the stomach
the worms light the brain’s fuses
they are very short these fuses
the spark spells the end of speculations
a slap answers a stupid question

a sharp retort answers a simple inquiry. (*Premonitions*
... 36)

In the above lines, the reader is confronted by an angry and defiant voice. The hunger of the oppressed translates into violence. Consequently, there is a slap for a stupid question and a sharp response for a simple inquiry. The angry tone of the poem arises from the attitude of the rulers who have plunged society into turbulent waters by their deceitful and selfish policies. They not only mean bad for the people but have become vultures preying on the people and their resources. In the second stanza, Eghagha warns that the effects are disastrous:

when hunger comes visiting
he invites the father of anger
when they meet inside the house
the world comes to an end. (*Premonitions* ... 36)

Hunger and anger are driving forces for revolution that must bring “the world to an end”. The world in the above refers to an old regime which the revolution is poised to end. This is more obvious in the last stanza:

when anger remains for too long
the mind does funny things
it loses respect for mother-in-law
it can even tell a good wife to go away
it makes the people drive away leaders. (*Premonitions*
... 36)

The people’s anger rises to a crescendo. Since the love for power by the leaders is motivated by greed and has caused hunger and starvation to remain so long in the society, Eghagha is of the view that the anger of the oppressed has accumulated to an unbearable measure. This points to the fact that at a critical point in their consciousness of oppression, human societies must rise and put an axe to the chains that bind them in order to liberate themselves. Onwudinjo further explains that “having waited for so long for a solution to the national contradictions and dilemmas, the younger generation of poets are now reacting with anger and threatening revolution” (160). Eghagha’s “Hunger and anger” evokes frightful threats against the wreckers of individual and national hopes and aspirations. The poem incites and resounds with revolutionary appeal. Eghagha believes that it is only through revolution that salvation will come to the society.

“The last lover” is a passionate comment on the marginalization that has become the lot of the masses in the hands of self-seeking politicians. The title of the poem is a metaphor to end the deceitful love that does no good to the society. In the first stanza, Eghagha holds that

the fire is now ash
we swim into tomorrow’s sea
your laughter is lip laughter
your smile bites
fear into my face
inside your insides
anger is red like
the oil fire of Jesse. (*Rhythms* ... 9)

In the above lines, Eghagha exposes the estrangement of the masses from the government they elected into power. The hatred of those elected is compared to “oil fire of Jesse”. Their acts are hypocritical; only lip service and their smiles inevitably instills fear into the masses.

In the second stanza, the rift between the masses and upper class expands through name calling:

you have called me a baboon
you have called me *okrika*
i come from a firm homestead
i shall not call my senior a parrot. (*Rhythms ... 9*)

Obviously, those in power wage an all-out war against change in order to perpetuate themselves in the seats of power. This is why they call their fellow citizens *okrika*. *Okrika* is a community in Rivers State. It is also a pejorative name for second-hand clothing especially among the Igbo. In the context of the poem, *okrika* is a metaphor of inferiority, a metaphor of under doggedness of the Delta polity. It further connotes second-hand, not-original, but half-used clothing. The revolutionary appeal in the poem is foreshadowed in the third stanza. Eghagha challenges the last lover: “you are my last lover / i reject your cast-iron phallus / in masquerade of green” (*Rhythms ... 9*). The impulse unmistakably continues in the last six lines of the last stanza:

your seed was a seed of webbings
with no track for
the path that builds
nest and homes
for the weak birds
of my race. (*Rhythms ... 9*)

Eghagha nudges the oppressed masses to rise up and reject their ill-fated destiny. Phallus is an instrument of oppression. But because of the deceitful nature of the bourgeois, they have masqueraded this oppressive tool in green thus, sowing a seed that grows no homes for the people. The society has no future because the future that is promised will never come since the claws of today’s avarice have devoured it. Eghagha believes that in rejecting the last lover, the masses, through revolution will better the lot of society. Against this backdrop, Onwudingo speaks of the poets of Eghagha’s generation as

Perceiving themselves as the leaders, visionaries, prophets and saviours of the masses as well as part of the oppressed masses. Through various forms, they help the masses to look beyond the made-up smiles of insincere politicians; they often confront the masses with the gorgon’s head lying in ambush behind the fawning smiles and empty promises of ... politicians. (156)

Through the rejection of *okrika* citizenship, the poet advocates a revolt against the oppressors, warning that oppression can bring nothing but violence on the part of the oppressed.

Obviously, Eghagha’s poetry resounds with revolutionary impulse. Through well crafted epithets, he has shown poetry as Ikiddeh argues “... a favourite medium for arousing the consciousness of the people to their place in the world ...” (91). Realistically, Eghagha’s poetry captures life in the society and challenges the masses to take revolutionary action against the callousness of the leaders. The ideology behind this motive is to mobilize the society towards a people oriented leadership. Eghagha’s poetry, to corroborate Eagleton thus “becomes an ideological resolution of real contradictions” (*Criticism... 110*) intrinsic in the society. His poetry brings to limelight John Kennedy’s famous statement: “When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitation. When power narrows the area of man’s concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.” (87)

Eghagha's commitment to the cause of the society especially, the masses who bear the brunt of leadership excesses is undisputable. Kalu Uka explains that any writer who wants to be "... committed ... must fit into some kind of programme for action" (21). The touching impulse in the poetry of Eghagha aptly fits in as a programme for revolutionary action. Onoge further holds that

... Marxists ... do not conceive literary (works) as an abstract academic activity with abstract justifications. Marxists ... are necessarily class partisan. They do not camouflage this partisanship. Marxists ... also recognize that the very analytical categories which constitute the vocabulary of literary scholarship are themselves historical products. (472)

Eghagha is not unaware that every area of life, not excluding the very boundaries of imagination is affected by the way society is structured. His poetry mirrors strict class stratification. This is why in his poetry, to quote Egudu "... we are not treated to any glorious vision of any integrated or stable situation, but are harangued with a vision of reality which consists of nothing but ugliness ..." (*Modern ...* 84). It seems therefore right to state that Eghagha's imaginative leap to grasp reality is a testimony to help society struggle for a certain quality of life free from all parasitic exploitative relations.

Stylistics Techniques

The concept of style in literature is idiosyncratic. This emanates from the fact that every poet possesses a distinct style. Poets use style to satisfy various necessities. Leech and Short explain that

Style itself like many semi-technical terms has suffered from over definition and the history and linguistic thought is littered with unsuccessful attempts to attach a precise meaning to it ... style is a way in which language is used: that is, it belongs to "parole" rather than "langue". (11)

Oha holds that style is "a manner of discourse or tone of speaking, adapted in addressing others or in ordinary form of conversation, particularly of skilled construction in which the work of art is executed by individual artists of his time or place ..." (343). Eghagha's apt delineation of style to present the realities of oppression in the society, known and easily recognizable within the spectrum of a particular time and space is an obvious substantiation of the above suppositions. For the poet, style is basic in considering the relationship between content and form on the one hand, and the effects the poet wants to achieve on the reader. He adopts his own type of aesthetic complexion which helps him to create significant ideas, images and metaphors aimed at stirring the oppressed masses into revolutionary struggle. Aspects of these aesthetic complexions which include the use of language, images and symbols, and graphic experimentation will be discussed in the remaining part of the study.

Language

The importance of language in the study of style cannot be overemphasized. Language is the domain of style in literary discourse. Again, Leech and Short aver that "... examining the language of a literary text can be a means to a further understanding and appreciation of the writer's artistic achievement" (3). Brook equally explains that the "primary function of language is to convey ideas from one person to another, but these ideas may be information, command or entreaty. Language is used to make it clear whether we are well or ill disposed towards the person addressed or it may simply be a way of calling attention to ourselves, the equivalent of a mild, depreciating cough, which may itself be a form of language" (12). From the foregoing, language becomes an issue of choice depending

on the encoding situation. It invariably represents the image of the writer at any given time. In the poetry of Eghagha, varied expressions are presented through various languages that appeal to the impulse of the masses to take revolutionary action against any form of social ill. Employing the language of persuasion, the poet invites the masses to unite and form a common stage to fight the structures that create and sustain their oppression.

The poet's use of language in his poetry is outstanding. The theme of revolutionary impulse is craftily soused with the language. Consequently, it allows the poet the freedom to engage in a revolutionary alliance with the masses. He makes use of conscious narrative and descriptive personae that narrate events and describe things with the minutest details. This narrative and descriptive vigour is portrayed in the following lines of "Clothes of Nakedness" where the persona speaks thus of the insincerity of the leaders:

when you return
what shall you see
they wear the clothes now
those men
who swore that nakedness
is purity
they buy mills of them
from hospital allocations
the victims
are felled like ripe seeds
each morning
before the news
yet they call us brothers
these patriots (*Rhythms* ... 15)

The simple diction of the above lines does not make them non-poetic. The poet uses such epithets as would appeal to and mobilize the masses against the lack of vision and hypocrisy of the leaders. In this sense, Widdowson reinforces that "at the heart of literary creation is the struggle to device patterns of language which will bestow upon the linguistic items concerned just those values which will convey the individual writer's personal vision" (42).

Furthermore, there is seething anger, outrage and militancy in the language of Eghagha. The poet expresses a strong aversion to the cruelty of oppression on the masses. In "The Democrats" and "Hunger and Anger", Eghagha employs open confrontation as a panacea to the existing oppressive system: "the democrats .../ their laws hold the land in the cesspit of time .../ let us hold parliament we the people/ parliament vanishes when/ the people are no parliamentarians (*Premonitions* ... 25-6). In "Hunger and Anger", the poet's revulsion for the agents of oppression is seen in the following lines:

when hunger comes visiting
he invites the father of anger
when they meet inside the house
the world comes to an end
when anger remains for too long
the mind does funny things
it loses respect for a mother-in-law
it can even tell a good wife to go away
it makes the people drive away their leaders.
(*Premonitions* ... 36)

The above rigid language form expressed by Eghagha seems therefore like a keg of gun powder waiting to explode in the face oppression and brutality.

At other times, the persona employed by the poet draws the emotion of the masses through the use of narrative details as we see in “In the Dock” which captures the tale of the ill-fated and cruel death of the nine Ogonis rendered in suppressed metaphors:

guilty
the opaque voice
the wigged kangaroo
judgement
delivered pilate again
yet the nine men
must go into the dungeon
must go into the dark riverside
home to shark crocodiles. (*Rhythms ... 13*)

The allusive metaphors and descriptive epithets in the above poem are apt dictions in imaging the death of these people. The language further demonstrates a revolutionary gesture on the masses to perpetually continue in the resolve of the heroes. The use of language by Eghagha will not pose any problem to an average reader not just because it is simple and straightforward but because the circumstances of the deaths of the heroes are familiar to both the poet and the Nigerian audience. The poet’s use of language thus serves as a redemptive force that helps the masses to overcome the paucity, poverty and obnoxious circumstances that prevail in the society.

Recurrent Images and Symbols

Eghagha creates fascinating images and symbols in describing concepts, ideas or events. To understand his poetry adequately, full appreciation of these images and symbols is inevitably basic. These images as identified in this study include those of loss, rottenness and decay, suffering and oppression, and fauna.

Images of Loss:

Eghagha’s “The Democrats” is imbued with images of loss – vision, dream, and hope – which point out glaringly, the man-made chasm that creates intra-class schism in the society:

Parliament is in their hands
legislators have eaten the pounding pestle
they cannot sit on the chairs
... their eyes are shut, shut from the shoes of truth
... their laws hold the land in the cesspit of time.
(*Premonitions ... 25*)

Because the democrats have eaten the pounding pestle – a symbol designated for promulgating laws for the good of the society – their eyes are shut from the path of truth and invariably, the laws emanating from this loss of vision engulf society in oppression and revolutionary struggle.

Images of Decay and Rottenness:

Another notable image in the poetry of Eghagha is that of decay and rottenness. From “The Prelude” and “The house”, the following is evident:

A fresh lunatic arrives
restless with unfathomable delusions

he gathers new garbage
tins, pans, buckets, polythene bags
enmeshed in new filth
squats on the floor
his coming is like the previous
loud in ovation, puny in action. (*Rhythms...8*)

And from “The house”:

the hollow house stands inside
 h o w l i n g
 depths of sacred sand
 not even that can save it
its builders build with
 a wish of self ownership
 fetching rotten woods
from the forest for the foundation
h o w l i n g m a d n e s s. (*Premonitions ... 13*)

Eghagha’s “fresh lunatic” are images that best capture the ominous legacies of selfish affluent leaders. The poet shocks the reader with these vivid images of rot and decay. Obviously, the poet wants the reader especially, the oppressed masses to capture the evil ingenuity of the oppressors invoked through the images of “garbage tins, pans, buckets, polythene bags ... new filth”, and to showcase the effect of their monstrosity on society.

Images of Suffering and Oppression:

Images of suffering and oppression are prevalent in some of the poems of Eghagha.

In “The Song”, Eghagha’s crafting of images of oppression is appreciated in the following lines:

... i see flowing-apparel men
at desks overflowing with oil
they bark orders
they ban others
they create organs
organs of orgy
to tie up our tongues. (*Rhythms ... 12*)

Equally, in “Clothes of Nakedness”, Eghagha deploys images that explain the reason for so much suffering in the society:

they wear the clothes now
those men
who swore that nakedness
is purity
they buy mills of them
from hospital allocations
the victims
are felled like ripe seeds
each morning
before the news
yet they call us brothers
these patriots (*Rhythms ... 15*)

The irony of “patriots” and the music of the rhythmic orgies and commands in the above poems provide vivid illustrations of suffering and oppression, occasioned by the unimaginable distribution of wealth in a society where the citizens are deprived of vigour, and have to resort to alms for survival. It is inevitably a grim picture because the life the masses wish for becomes stillborn.

Fauna Images: The concept of fauna is portrayed by Eghagha in the following lines of the poem, “In the Dock”:

... yet the nine men
must go into the dungeon
must go into the dark riverside
home to shark-crocodiles. (*Rhythms ... 13*)

Rivers, which are homes to fauna images of “crocodiles and shark crocodiles”, are metaphors that will dislodge the powers of the rich and reject their manoeuvres.

These images in the poetry of Eghagha reflect gross imbalance and disorder from what the poet portrays as a spiritual sterility that spurs men into the curse of violence against society. These images equally enrich the poetic aesthetics of Eghagha with vividness and clarity of craft and vision.

Graphological Patterns

Another stylistic feature in the poetry of Eghagha is the presence of graphological patterns. This is also known as pattern or concrete poetry. It is a situation whereby the poet’s intent is conveyed in graphic patterns of letters, words, or symbols rather than by the meaning of words in conventional arrangement. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “the writer of concrete poetry uses typeface and other typographical elements in such a way that chosen units – letter fragments, punctuation marks, graphemes (letters), morphemes (any meaningful linguistic unit), syllables, or words (usually used in a graphic rather than denotative senses) – and graphic spaces form an evocative picture”. Also, Crystal and Davy describe graphology as “... the analogous study of a language’s writing system, or orthography, as seen in various kinds of handwriting and typography ... distinctive uses of punctuation, capitalization, spacing and so on” (18). Eghagha’s “The house” shows evidence of graphological pattern in its structural arrangement:

the hollow house stands inside
 h o w l i n g
 depths of sacred sand
 not even that can save it
its builders build with
 a wish of self-ownership
 fetching rotten woods
from the forest for the foundation ...
h o w l i n g m a d n e s s. (*Premonitions ... 13*)

In the above, Eghagha presents a compelling subject in a successful exquisite form to help the comprehension of the poem. The unconventional cavities between the lines and stanzas of the poem convey hollowness of the house. Eghagha obviously wants the masses to see the despoliation of the collective dreams of the society because they are laid in “depths of sacred sand” that cannot “even save it”. Furthermore, for Eghagha, beginning each line of the poem with small letters and the absence of full-stops at the end of each line apart from the last line, portrays a collective action needed from the masses for a successful revolution. Through the use of Carmen figuration poetic form, the poet manipulates the overall shape of the poem in order to mimic its subject.

From the foregoing, the poetic style of Eghagha reflects the gory realities of deprivation, dispossession and oppression that prompt the oppressed masses into revolt. The greatest achievement of the poet under study appears to be the deployment of appropriate language and images aimed at arresting societal ills and disequilibrium. Against this backdrop, Booker-Prize-winning author, Arundhati Roy, speaking at the 2005 World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, on the function of literature for our times avers that “our strategy should be not only to confront the empire, but to lay siege to it ... with our art, our music, our literature ... and our ability to tell our own stories” (qtd. in Emezue “Dialogism...” 224). In using style, this is obviously the objective of Eghagha. Fanon further avers that

This is sufficient explanation of the style of those ... intellectuals who decide to give expression to this ... consciousness which is in process of being liberated. It is a harsh style, full of images, for the image is the drawbridge which allows unconscious energies to be scattered on the surrounding meadows. It is a vigorous style, alive with rhythms, struck through and through with bursting life; it is full of colour ... sunbaked and violent It reveals the need that man has to liberate himself from a part of his being which already contained the seeds of decay. (177)

Being conscious, the poet realizes the immense problems of society and seek to use art as a tool to re-shape, re-direct and re-interpret the ideas and values of the society immersed in seeds of decay. Finally, the style of Eghagha is a pragmatic one which simultaneously realizes its respective goals of prodding the oppressed to be conscious of their deprived condition and to work hard to throw off the yoke.

Conclusion

The poetry of Eghagha is a direct, radical and violent response and reaction to the seeds of disequilibrium and decay in the society. It is a conscious move to revolutionize the consciousness of society. The most affective observation however appears to be the implication of adapting the Psycho-Marxist approach in reading Nigerian poetry. From the research viewpoint, it seems that this approach helps to underscore the awareness on the part of the poet that his art serves a revolutionary transformative function in the society.

Furthermore, the reflection on various forms of oppression meted out to the masses has become an outstanding factor for Eghagha. The collections of poems, despite various headings, possess the dominant theme of revolutionary impulse. This interpretational approach gives rise to a situation of mutual expectation and mutual fulfillment based on awareness of the functional abilities of the artist, his art and style. This, as it appears is one of the achievements of Psycho-Marxist reading of poetry. The effects of these achievements have been discussed in the study as can be seen in the appropriate deployment of inciting epithets, images and symbols. In conclusion, it seems right to state that Hope Eghagha has unequivocally used revolutionary impulse to awaken in the masses, the perpetual urge to throw off the burden of oppression placed on them by oppressive leaders.

For such collections of poems such as *Rhythms of the Last Testament* and *Premonitions and Other Dreams*, each reading becomes an exercise in multiplicity of meaning and purpose. As conscious poet, these volumes attest to the idea that he was composing for fair and better co-existence in the society. This further underscores his authenticity of intention. Thus, the Psycho-Marxist approach to the reading of the poetry of Eghagha offers a revolutionary understanding and mindset to contemporary Nigerian poetry.

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