

Research Article

A Literary Interpretation and Appreciation of Ngwaba¹'s Poem "Ode on Spirits"

Ntakobajira Cizungu Furaha Marie-Claire

University of Kinshasa, Congo
Email: mariefuraha@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This article analyses, interprets and appreciates Ngwaba's poem entitled "Ode on Spirits". The analysis focuses on the description of its formal organization and its semantic organization.

Keywords: Literature, analysis, interpretation and appreciation, formal organization, semantic organization.

1. Presentation of the poem

Ode on Spirits

Some sell spirit,
And so write: "we sell spirit here":
For the body in trances?
And the soul, in ruin?

A story to retell:
When the breath says adieu,
The body falls
For the soul to say adieu, too:
For a rest, or for slavery?

The soul, your double, is
Spirit, and so immortal to die:
Spirit never dies.

When the breath says adieu,
After selling, or enjoying spirit, or the like,
Dark dirty souls unwash'd and unclean'd
Turn into evil spirits, and
Quickly enchain'd for slavery!
To be overused
In harming and ruining lives
In the dark.

There's room, in the dark, for millions and millions
Of those in the kingdom of darkness.
Along with the prince of the dark?
And for whom Hell?

¹Ngwaba Bimbala Ferdinand is a Congolese poet. He has been a poet laureate since 1966, and since 2006, he is a professor of literature and English studies at the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences at the University of Kinshasa, the capital city of The Democratic Republic of Congo. He has published three collections of poems: *Why I Write Poetry* (2009), *Poems for Souls* (2017:9) and *The Souls at God's Time* (2020). He also wrote *Exercises in Poetic Discourse Analysis: from Theory to Practice* (2013). He published several poems in four different literary anthologies in the United States of America. He sees poetry as an art, and art itself as an aesthetic expression of an ideal that an artist has in mind, and would like to express.

Interpretation is the process of explaining the *meaning* of a text, gathering evidence (from within the literary text) and making reasoned inferences from that evidence. It moves from the specific to the general, from the details of the literary work into more conceptual terms². "In general, to interpret something is to make it personally meaningful. Our brain takes raw data from the senses and makes it meaningful by relating it into our previous experience"³.

Literary appreciation on the other hand, is the process of recognizing/admiring and explaining the values or qualities of a work after carefully studying its good and bad features. It says how a particular device is suited to the subject matter, central theme, feeling, tone or the effects created in the reader by referring it to the text (Ngwaba, 2017:28). "It is simply the ability to understand, enjoy and evaluate works of Literature i.e. to make judgment about the quality or value of literary works"⁴.

2. Analysis and interpretation

2.1. Description of the formal organization of the poem

Ngwaba (2013:32) explains: "The description of the formal organization of the poem consists of describing the formal structure of the poem". "The formal organization of a poem is a term used to describe the structure of a poem as a substance in terms of its physical components or that which a poem is made of; its formal structure (Ngwaba 2013:114).

Tracing a path to poetry analysis, Ngwaba writes: "There are lots of questions to answer and answers should be provided for each and all of these questions about the form of the poem:

1. How many stanzas are there in the poem?
2. What type of poetry is that?
3. What is the rhyme scheme like?
4. How many lines are there in each stanza?
5. What are the main parts of speech used?
6. What tense is used, between the present and the past?
7. And what modal verbs are used?
8. What are the main sense devices used?

Written in free verse, *Ode on Spirits* is a 24-line free verse narrative poem in five-stanzas. The first and five stanzas are quadruplets, the second stanza has five lines, the third is a triplet, the fourth is made of eight lines, and the last stanza has four lines. The most outstanding parts of speech used in this poem are noun, adjective, pronoun, verb, adverb, preposition and conjunction. "Words are divided into different kinds or classes, called Parts of Speech, according to their use; that is, according to the work they do in a sentence. They are eight in number: noun, adjective, pronoun, verb, adverb, preposition, conjunction and interjection" (Wren & Martin, 2008:3).

The **nouns** used are "ode", "spirit", "body", "trances", "ruin", "story", "breath", "soul", "rest", "slavery", "double", "the like", "lives", "dark", "room", "millions", "kingdom", "prince", "darkness", and "hell" respectively in lines 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, and the title. The **adjectives** used are "your", "immortal", "dark dirty" and "evil" respectively in lines 10, 11, 15, and 16. The **pronouns** used include "some", "we", "those" and "whom" respectively in lines 1, 2, 22, and 24. The **verbs** in simple present tense used are "sell", "write", "says", "falls", "is", "dies", and "turn" respectively in lines 1, 2, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 16, and 21. The infinitive used includes "to retell", "to say", "to die", and "to be" respectively in lines 5, 8, 11, and 18. The present participle denoting a progression occurs in "selling", "enjoying", "harming", and "ruining" respectively in lines 14 and 19. The past participle is used in "unwash'd", "unclean'd", "enchain'd", "to be overused" respectively in lines 15, 17 and 18. **Adverb** is a fifth part of speech employed in the poem: "here", "so", "when", "too", "never", "after", "quickly", "there" respectively in lines 2, 6, 8, 12, 11, 13 and 14, 17, 21.

The **prepositions** used in the poem are: "for", "in", "to", "of", "into", "along with" and "on" respectively in lines 3, 8, 9, 17, 21, 24, 3, 4, 19, 20, 21, 22, 8, 11, 18, 22, 23, 16, 23 and the title of the poem. The **conjunctions** used are "and" and "or" respectively in lines 2, 4, 24, 11, 15, 16, 19, 21, 24, 9 and 14.

²Interpreting literary works in <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu> of 07/07/2023.

³Literary interpretation in <http://www.epc.edu/state/humanities/handouts/cr.html> p1 in Ngwaba's *Theory of Literary Criticism of 2017* p 68.

⁴Literary appreciation in <https://www.coursehero.com/file/62839021/NOTES-ON-LITERARY-APPRECIATIONpdf/> of 27/03/2021.

The **punctuation marks** used in the poem are comma, colon, quotation marks, question mark, period, apostrophe and exclamation mark respectively in lines 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24.

The most striking sense devices used in *Ode on Spirits* are: repetition, variation, substitution, kenning, ellipsis, image, symbol, personification, ambiguity, rhetorical question, allusion, and euphemism.

The comma is repeated sixteen times in lines 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16 and 21. The colon and the question mark are repeated five times in lines 2, 2, 5, 8 and 11. The period is repeated three times in lines 12, 20 and 22. The prepositions "for" is repeated seven times respectively in lines 3, 8, 9, 9, 17, 21 and 24. The preposition "in" is repeated six times in lines 3, 4, 19, 20, 21 and 22. The preposition "to" is repeated four times in lines 5, 8, 11 and 18. The preposition "of" is repeated three times in lines 22, 22 and 23. The simple present tense is repeated ten times in lines 1, 2, 2, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 21. The present participle is repeated four times as well as the past participle and the infinitive form in lines 14, 14, 19, 19; 15, 15, 17, 18 and 5, 8, 11, 18. The nouns "spirit" is repeated seven times in lines 1, 2, 11, 12, 14, 16 and the title; "soul" is repeated four times in lines 4, 8, 10, 15; "dark" three times in lines 15, 20, 23; and "body"; "breath" twice as well as "slavery" in lines 3,7;6, 13; and 9, 17. The conjunction "and" is repeated eight times in lines 2, 4, 11, 15, 16, 19, 21 and 24. The conjunction "or" is repeated three times in lines 9, 14 and 14. The exclamation "adieu" is repeated three times in lines 6, 8 and 13. The adverb "so" is repeated twice as well as "when" in lines 2, 11 and 6, 13.

Variation is a second prominent sense device used in this poem as seen in "In the dark" and "the kingdom of darkness" respectively in lines 20 and 22. **Substitution** occurs with the demonstrative pronoun "those" and "for whom" respectively in lines 22 and 24 are used to substitute "millions and millions" in line 21. **Kenning** is apparent "in the kingdom of darkness" in line 22 which means hell and the prepositional phrase "the prince of the dark" in line 23 to mean Satan. **Ellipsis** is another sense device used in this poem and it appears in "Unwash'd", "unclean'd", and "enchain'd" which are contracted forms respectively in lines 15 and 17. Another case of ellipsis occurs in lines 3, 4 and 22-24 because no single verb is used.

Images are read in the poem such as "sell spirit", "the body in trances", "soul in ruin", "when the breath says adieu", "the body falls", "the soul is spirit and so immortal to die", "dark dirty souls unwash'd and unclean'd", "turn into evil spirits", "harming and ruining lives", and "millions and millions" respectively in lines 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15, 16, 19, and 21. **Symbol** also occurs in the poem: "Spirit", "breath", "soul" respectively in lines 1, 3, 4, and 6 which stand for immortality; "body" in line 3 stands for mortality; and "ruin", "dark dirty souls" and "hell" respectively in lines 4, 15 and 24 stand for evil.

Personification occurs in "When the breath says adieu", "After selling, or enjoying spirit, or the like" respectively in lines 13 and 14. **Ambiguity** is remarkable in "some sell spirit" and "we sell spirit here" respectively in lines 1 and 2 because of the double meaning of spirit; spirit as strong liquor and spirit the entity from which a human being is made of or the soul. **Rhetorical question** occurs in lines 3, 4, 9, 23 and 24. **Allusion** occurs in "we sell spirit here" line 2. **Euphemism** occurs in "says adieu". The **exclamation mark** is used at the end of line 17, and a **quotation mark** is used in "we sell spirit here", line 2.

2.2. Discussion of the semantic organization of the poem

"There are ten points to focus on in order to negotiate and understand meanings: paraphrasing the poem, description of the scenario, stating the subject matter, the central theme and sub-themes, discussing the feelings aroused and the effects created in the poem, the tone and the poet's intention. Next, come a discussion of the poet's controlled use of language or how meaning is actually conveyed; and a personal appreciation of the poem in terms of its literary and artistic values, and saying if the poem would be of any significance thirty or fifty years from now, including a personal appreciation about whether or not you like it, why and why not; and whether or not you would recommend the same poem to other people?" (Ngwaba, 2013:33).

Paraphrased version

A Word on Spirits

Some people sell strong liquor,
And put this inscription: "We sell strong liquor here"
For the pleasure of the body,
And the soul in destruction?

A story to tell and tell again:
When the breath leaves the body,
The body collapses
And the soul leaves, too:
For eternal life, or for hell.

The soul, is a man's double,
And the spirit is immortal to die:
For the spirit never dies.

When the breath leaves the body,
Those who sold, bought, drunk and get lost into this world's sweetness,
Dirty: uncleansed souls, unwashed
Become evil spirits, and
Quickly tied up for servitude
To be overused
In harming and tormenting people
In the dark.

There is a room in the dark for thousands and thousands
Of those souls in the kingdom of darkness.
Where they live with Satan
And Hell is their eternal home.

Scenario

A synonym for scenario is situation, which is a paralinguistic feature along with gestures, body expressions, and other prosodic features as pitch information focus. The purpose of the scenario is to help create a mental representation, a kind of diagram of the events that contribute to understand meaning (Richards, 1925:14&17). The description of the scenario focuses on participants (speaker and addressee), topic or content, network, relationships, tone, purpose, and setting (Preston, 1989: 122-186).

The **topic** of the scenario is "Ode on Spirits". It is mostly about the souls of people who, after pleasing their bodies with the sweetness of this world, die without repenting, and are driven to the kingdom of darkness. The **speaker** is-a voice speaking, a kind of narrator who seems to know everything he is talking about. He knows that people sell and enjoy liquor, and he also seems to know what happens at death and after death which is a bit unusual. He could be the poet himself. He appears like someone who cares much about the eternal stay of people' souls.

There are five **addressees**: the audience, the spirit sellers, the spirit users, evil spirits, and the prince of the dark. The last three addresses are addressed indirectly. There are three addresses in the 1st stanza: the implied general audience made up of non-sellers (verse 1), the true audience is made up people selling spirit (verses 1, 2) and the audience using the spirit (v3). One addressee in the 2nd stanza: the general audience again (vv6-8) because everyone has to die. There is one addressee in the fourth stanza: the evil spirits which are the outcome of the unwashed souls of people who died without repenting (vv 14-17). The other addressee in the last stanza: the prince of darkness (v 22). To help find the general audience, the speaker uses the pronoun "some" (v1) to allow make inferences of those who do not sell spirits.

Two types of **network** tie the speaker to the five addressees in the poem, namely humanity and the world we live in. There are also two types of **relations**, as illustrated in the chart below:

Description of the scenario in Ngwaba's *Ode on Spirits*

Speaker	Addressee	Relation	Network
I - speaker, a kind of spokesperson, possibly the poet himself	1. General audience	Human beings	Humanity
	2. Spirit sellers	Human beings	Humanity
	3. Spirit users	Creatures	The world we live in
	4. Evil spirits	Creatures	The world we live in
	5. Prince of the dark	Creatures	The world we live in

Between the speaker and the general audience and the spirit sellers the relation is that of human beings subjected to death and judgment. **The network** that ties the general audience and the speaker is humanity; they are all connected by it.

From these relations, it becomes obvious that **the purpose** of the poem is for the audience and the spirit sellers to beware of the kingdom of the dark. The poet's **intention** is to warn them about the risk of dying uncleansed and joining the kingdom of darkness. **The tone** is narrative because the speaker is narrating what he observes, and it is also serious because it deals with life after death which is a quite serious issue to consider, although some think that there is nothing after death.

Subject matter of the poem

Ode on Spirits tells about the final destination of uncleansed souls, liquors sellers and consumers after death which is hell or kingdom of the dark. The dirty souls turn into evil spirits for harming and ruining lives in the dark.

The first stanza tells about liquors sellers and users who please their bodies by getting drunk, and at the same time ruining their own souls. The second stanza tells about the mysterious separation of the breath, the soul and the body, and raises this question of the final destination of the soul, whether it goes for an eternal rest or ruin?

The third stanza tells about the soul which is man's double as being immortal. The fourth stanza points out the fact that dark dirty souls which turn into evil spirits are destined to slavery, where they will be overused in harming and ruining lives in the dark. The Bible reads: "When an unclean spirit goes out of someone it wanders through waterless country looking for a place to rest, and ... "I will return to the house I came from" (Matthew 16: 26a).

The last stanza displays the big number of those uncleansed souls in the kingdom of darkness along with the Prince of the dark to be burnt in Hell as the Bible reads: "The Son of man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of failing and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth (Matthew 13:41-42).

Themes

A theme is a literary work's main issue or statement (Venturino, 2013:308). Reinforcement by repetition, substitution and variation helps for emphasis and thematic arrangement (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973:428).

Central theme

The central theme of this poem is hell being the final destination and stay for millions and millions of people whose souls shall become evil spirits because they died without repenting. The last stanza of the poem reads:

There's room, in the dark, for millions and millions
Of those in the kingdom of darkness.
Along with the prince of the dark?
And for whom Hell?

This poem is deeply drawn from Christian belief. The Bible reads: "Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to destruction is wide and spacious, and many take it" (Matthew 7: 13).

Secondary themes

Nine sub-themes can be pointed out in this poem, namely pleasure, soul's ruin, death, rest, slavery, immortality of soul, the role of evil souls, the number of bad spirits and hell. Pleasure means enjoyment, happiness or satisfaction, or something that gives this (Bottomley, 2003:949). Soul's ruin is the destruction of the soul of the people who enjoyed life and got lost in the sweetness of this world, and died without repenting. This soul's ruin refers to the second death, as the Bible reads: "Then he will say to those on his left hand, "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew, 25:41). Death is a common fate for human beings. It is the separation of body and soul (Komonchak, 1992:272). The body dies. The term RIP, meaning Rest in Peace, often written on grave stones is said to express the hope that someone's spirit has found peace after it has died (Bottomley, 2003:1065). The sub-theme of slavery in the third stanza is opposed to 'rest' and means the same thing as soul's ruin, but

both slavery and rest are experienced by the soul after a human being dies. The immortality of the soul could be explained by the fact that the soul is immaterial because it is a spirit that cannot die. The soul is subject to judgment on the last day. It is man's double and heir (v10).

The "role of evil spirits" as subtheme refers to the job that those people who die uncleansed and unwashed do in harming and ruining individuals in the dark (vv15 to 20). One of the roles of bad spirits is that of disturbing and causing trouble to people (v19). The Bible reads: "When he reached the territory of Gadarenes on the other side, two demoniacs came towards him out of the tombs-they were dangerously violent that nobody could use that path" (Matthew, 8:28).

The sub-themes of bad spirits and hell could be seen in lines 18 to 20. Those bad spirits refer to the souls of sinners/evil doers whose final destination is hell along with the Prince of darkness in lines 22 to 24.

Feelings aroused in the poem

The reading of *Ode on Spirits* arouses mixed feelings in the reader: happiness or pleasure, fear, sadness and uncertainty. The idea of selling and enjoying spirits or liquor arouses the feeling of happiness or pleasure that men have after enjoying strong liquor. People who drink feel happy in their bodies because liquor cools down its users. Also, liquor helps its users forget their problems for a while: "For the body in trances?" (line 3).

The feeling of fear is expressed in line 17 and is associated with the idea of slavery and hell. The feeling of sadness could be explained by the big number of souls which will go to hell to be burnt eternally along with the Prince of the dark. The feeling of uncertainty could be explained by the skepticism brought in lines 3, 4, 9, 23, and 24 ending with question marks, thus leaving the reader uncertain whether or not using liquor is for pleasure or for the ruin of the soul. Does it free or enslave the soul? The speaker asks the question "for a rest, or for slavery?", and "for whom Hell?", he says..

Effects created by the poem

The poem creates four effects in the reader: pleasure, fear of God, wisdom, and good care of the body. The effect of pleasure is created by those who sell spirit and use those strong liquors to please the body (lines 1 and 3). The effect of the fear of God is achieved in verses 10, 11, 12 and 13. The reader is somehow afraid to go to hell, and this will make him/her change to escape hell. Additionally, the effect of wisdom leads the reader to an awareness, good judgment, and prudence.

The care of the body is felt in line 3 which makes the reader think profoundly of keeping his/her own body cleansed, being the temple of the Holy Spirit: "Do you not realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you and whom you received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6: 19).

Tone of the poem

The tone of the poem is at the same time narrative, serious and alerting. It is narrative because the speaker is narrating/telling the fate of the human beings who have chosen death by ruining their own bodies and souls that will turn into evil spirits. It is serious because the poet is dealing with a serious problem of human soul destruction after death. Nobody would escape from death and from the last judgment. It is alerting because the poem is a permanent warning for the readers by not ruining their lives and souls like those millions and millions of souls that will be driven to Hell. To some extent, the speaker would like his readers to repent in order to escape from hell.

The Poet's intention

By writing this poem and entitling it *Ode on Spirits* and by clearly stating that the soul, man's double is spirit and never dies, the poet's intention is to warn the audience not to ruin their own lives and souls in order to escape the kingdom of darkness.

3. Literary appreciation of Ode on Spirits

Literary appreciation goes hand in hand with literary interpretation, i.e. appreciation comes after interpretation and it is the general discussion of the poet's controlled use of discourse or how meaning is actually conveyed. It is also a personal appreciation of the poem in terms of its artistic and literary values, and say if the poem would be of any significance thirty or fifty years from now?, including personal opinions about whether or not you like it, why and why not?; and whether or not you would recommend the same poem to other people?

General appreciation of the poet's controlled use of language

In *Ode on Spirits* the use of discourse is select and controlled to help (1) convey the meaning detailed in the subject matter and themes, (2) arouse feelings, and (3) create effects he desires in his reader through the poem. The poet has used the language, paralinguistic and punctuation marks.

The language used in *Ode on Spirits* is poetic and rhetorical. It is poetic because it meets the characteristics of poetic discourse in that it is short, condensed, incomplete, connoted and implicit. It is rhetorical for it contains twelve rhetorical devices for such a short poem namely, repetition, variation, substitution, kenning, ellipsis, image, symbol, personification, ambiguity, rhetorical question, allusion, and euphemism.

The use of punctuation to convey the meaning desired by the poet

In order to help convey meaning intended by the poet, three punctuation marks, namely the colon, interrogative mark and inverted commas have been used. For a metalinguistic purpose, the colon is used five times in order to explain every statement. Moreover, the interrogative mark is used five times for rhetorical purposes.

The use of paralinguistic features to convey the meaning desired by the poet

In order to convey the meaning desired by the poet in *Ode on Spirits*, three paralinguistic features are used, namely the pitch, information focus and the scenario. The pitch or voice quality is high in the following prominent words: *some, sell, spirit, body, trances, soul, ruin, rest, slavery, immortal, adieu, after, selling, enjoying, evil, enchain'd overused, harming, lives, millions, kingdom, darkness, along, with, prince, for whom, and Hell*. The poetic function of this high pitch is to emphasize each of the words used in order to make them prominent. As a prosodic feature, information focus is achieved through the use of repetition, variation, and even the voice quality in this poem. For example, words like *sell, spirit* and *soul, in ruin* in the first stanza help to focus on sins as reason for the soul to be ruined after death. In the fourth stanza, words like *dirty, souls* and *unwash'd* help to focus on the same idea the idea of repentance to avoid the soul's ruin. *Millions* and *in the kingdom of darkness* help focus on the fact that many souls will go into hell as seen in the fifth stanza.

The use of language to convey the meaning desired by the poet

In *Ode on Spirits*, the language is controlled to help convey meaning as intended by the poet. It is select, poetic and rhetorical. There are twelve language devices in this poem as listed before.

Six out of the twelve literary devices are central to the poem: *repetition, allusion, rhetorical question, image, symbol* and *variation*.

The poet repeats the simple present tense ten times to express habitual actions in lines 1, 2, 6, 10, 12, 13, 16; to introduce quotation as in line 2 and express general truth as in lines 7, 10, 12, 21. The present participle is repeated four times in lines 14, 14, 19, 19 to represent actions as going on as well as the past participle in lines 15, 15, 17, 18 to represent completed actions and the infinitive form in lines 5, 8, 11, 18 in order to express purposes or determinations.

The noun 'spirit' is repeated seven times in four different ways and meanings. First, in lines 1, 2 and 14: "Some sell *spirit*"; "we sell *spirit* here"; "After selling, or enjoying *spirit*" spirit is used as a singular concrete noun meaning 'strong liquor' as sellers of wines write on the front wall of their boutiques to let customers know they can find and buy liquor there 'we sell spirit/strong liquor here'. Second, "spirit" is used as an abstract noun in lines 11 and 12 to point out the immaterial part that a man is made of, that never dies and subjected to judgment. In line 16, the abstract noun "spirits" is used in plural to point out the number of those dirty souls which turn into evil spirits after death of bad peoples. In the title of the poem, the noun "spirits" means a word on both spirit as immortal entity of a man and spirit as liquor.

The noun "soul" is repeated four times to address the entity that is double of a man and immortal like spirit, both being spiritual entities in a man. The word "dark" is used three times: as adjective to talk about the quality of souls in line 15, as noun to talk of place in lines 20 and 23. And nouns "body", "breath" and "slavery" are used twice. Allusion which is defined as a rhetorical lens in which reference is made to a person, event, object, or work from history or literature (Skiba, et al. 2003:314) is a second central device in this poem. The poet alludes to "spirit sellers", to sinners because sin separates people from God and brings them closer to Satan. Also, the poet alludes to "Hell" as the very last stay or place where evil spirits will be burnt forever. Rhetorical question is another central device used in this poem seen in verses 3, 4, 9, 23 and 24 for emphasis. There are three other central devices in this poem: image, symbol and variation. Twelve

images are found in the poem such as: “sell spirit”, “the body in trances”, “soul in ruin”, “when the breath says adieu”, “the body falls”, “the soul is spirit and so immortal to die”, “dark dirty souls unwash’d and unclean’d”, “turn into evil spirits”, “harming and ruining lives”, and “millions and millions” respectively in lines 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15, 16, 19, and 21. These ten images stigmatize sins, death, and the outcome of the souls and spirits of sinful people.

Four symbols are used in the poem: “Spirit” in lines 11, 12 and 16, “trances” and “soul” stand for immortality; “breath” symbolizes life; “body” stands for mortality; “ruin”, “dark dirty souls”; and “hell” stands for evil. Variation occurs when a word is indirectly repeated by using its synonym or a near-synonym as in “trances” and “rest”; “in ruin”, “for slavery”, “in the dark” and “the kingdom of darkness”; “immortal” and “never dies”; “unwash’d” and “unclean’d”. Actually, variation is used for the sake of emphasis.

Substitution is another device used in this poem for the sake of emphasis. The indefinite pronoun “some” and the personal pronoun “we” respectively in lines 1 and 2 are used to substitute the spirit sellers. In line 22, the demonstrative pronoun “those” is used to substitute “millions and millions” as well as the relative pronoun “whom” in line 24. The noun “the like” in line 14 is used to substitute “selling, or enjoying spirit” in line 14. The use of kenning is also apparent in this poem. Shaw (1972: 214) defines kenning as a conventional, poetic phrase in addition to the usual name of a person or object, a picturesque metaphorical compound. Two cases of kenning are used in this poem: the phrases “in the kingdom of darkness” in line 22 and “along with the prince of the dark” in line 23 respectively describe Hell and Satan. There is an ellipsis in this poem. An ellipsis is an omission or the leaving out of a word or words from a sentence when the meaning can still be understood without them (Ngwaba, 2013:54). Examples of ellipsis include “unwash’d”, “unclean’d”, “enchain’d”, “there’s” in lines 3, 4, and 22 to 24 are elliptical because no single verb is used. Personification is used in “When the breath says adieu” and “After selling, or enjoying spirit, or the like” since the breath is taken as an individual who was selling enjoying or the like in lines 13 and 14.

Ambiguity occurs in “we sell spirit here”. Skiba et al. (2003:314) argue that an ambiguity is a statement that has a double meaning or a meaning that cannot be clearly resolved. The word “spirit” in line 1 has double meaning. Spirit is one of the entities that human beings are made of apart from the body and the soul. Like the soul, the spirit is immaterial and regarded as immortal and invisible. A spirit is invisible and is of two types: a good spirit and an evil one. A good spirit is from a man who died clean and washed but an evil spirit is from someone who died without repenting. In its second meaning, the word spirit is used to mean strong liquor. So, sell spirit means sell strong liquor.

Euphemism is used in this poem in verses 6, 8, and 13 which is a soft way of saying ‘to die’. For the sake of emphasis, an exclamation mark has been used in verse 17. This exclamation mark helps to give an emphatic emotion to the prompt punishment evil spirits shall get at judgment’s day. And the poet uses a quotation mark in line 2 for emphasizing the presence or existence of spirit sellers. As a whole, language plays two basic roles in this poem: emotive and directive. Emotive because the poem focuses on the speaker’s emotional state toward spirit sellers and users. The directive function is achieved through the poet’s intention of warning his readers about the existence of Hell where unrepented souls shall go. So he wants them to repent.

4. Personal appreciation of the poem as an artistic and literary work

The reading of Ngwaba’s *Ode on Spirits* has been a great experience because the poem addresses a significant world issue of all time: life after death or the soul’s life when human beings die. And it generates high emotion such as fear of God since the souls will be judged by God who will decide either the souls go to slavery or to be saved as Jesus says: “fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell” (Matthew 10:28b). To some extent it is the meaning of being human that is questioned in this poem.

Moreover, the poem demonstrates some craft and artistry. The poet’s craft is remarkable in the skillful way of selecting words and poetic devices and rearranging them meaningfully well. For instance, the first two verses of the first stanza are striking:

Some sell spirit,
And so write: “we sell spirit here”

The two verses are at the same time ambiguous and allusive. It is allusive because “spirit” used here is not the immaterial part of a man but the poet uses it to allude to “strong wine and strong wine sellers” to mean

that strong wine is also called 'spirit'. Some liquor stores are called 'Liquor store' or 'Cave de vins spiritueux' or again 'We Sell Spirit here'. This is a serious concern on alcohol by the poet. Biblically speaking, wine is a gift from God to men:

"For cattle you make the grass grow,
And for people the plants they need,
To bring forth food from the earth,
And wine to cheer people's hearts,
Oil to make their face glow,
Food to make them sturdy of heart." (Psalm 104: 14-15)

For producers, sellers as well as for drinkers of wine, drinking wine is not prohibited as read in the biblical verses above but some people use alcohol to destroy themselves by getting drunk and drunkenness is source of many bad actions and sins what the entire poem *Ode on Spirits* tackles. By writing such poem, the poet invites people not to drink much alcohol to get drunk but to use it just as to cheer themselves as read below:

"We give parties to enjoy ourselves,
Wine makes us cheerful
And money has an answer for everything" (Ecclesiastes 10:19).

Another instance demonstrating the poet's craft in this poem at hand is found in the verses below:

"When the breath says adieu,
After selling, or enjoying spirit, or the like,
Dark dirty souls unwash'd and unclean'd
Turn into evil spirits" (*Ode on Spirits* vv 13-16).

Verses 13 to 16 imply that it is not bad to enjoy life at all, but this life enjoyment should be done carefully, cautiously and wisely in a way that does not harm the soul, so that it lives eternally in peace rather than in trouble. In fact, the poet would like the reader to get cleansed and washed.

Part of the poet's artistry is seen through his ability to use an ordinary experience of selling liquors and turn that in into a spiritual concern that break people's hearts. His artistry is also seen through the use of rhetorical questions as seen in the lines below:

"For the body in trances? (v3)
And the soul, in ruin? (v4)
For a rest, or for slavery? (v9)
Along with the prince of the dark? (v23)
And for whom Hell?" (v24)

The poet uses five rhetorical questions in this short poem and each question carries a message that can be a possible outcome of the human body and soul after death. All of these five rhetorical questions emphasize spiritual concern and create effects into the mind of the readers to see the possible outcome of their own bodies and souls after death. They are finally the dangers that get those individuals who die without repentance whom souls turn into evil spirits and end into be burnt and destroyed eternally in Hell as says the Bible: "Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to destruction is wide and spacious and many take it" (Matthew 7:13).

Conclusion

Ngwaba's poem *Ode on Spirits* raises a nature of evil and its cause, and it appeals to repentance and wisdom. The crucial fatal free choice of hell by lots of people makes the focal point of this poem at hand.

Ode on Spirits has the power to renew the spirit and refresh the reader's understanding of spiritual matters. To some extent, this poem helps expand our understanding of what it means to live on earth. I would recommend this poem to other readers. This poem is likely to remain significantly relevant as a warning and an appeal to repentance for the salvation of the soul, at least for those who believe in a second life after the body collapses.

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