

Conceptualization of Translation- A Search for Similarities and Dissimilarities

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Abstract: Translation plays a valuable role in the academy and beyond. Good translations can introduce scholars to new search, make works of literature and non-fiction available to new readers. Its complexity lies in being like the transfer of perfume from one bottle to another. As careful as you are, some fragrance is lost but the challenge remains to capture the essence. All things in nature are subject to change – and so is all cultural matter. Translation is always a shift, not between two languages but between the two types of cultural matter. A text, obviously written literally in one language in a given manifestation faces a multi reader & thus reaches out to a much larger base, unifying experiences & opinion as it expands. Like many other African writers, Achebe believes that artistic and literary works must deal primarily with the problems of society. He has said that "art is, and always was, at the service of man" rather than an end in itself, accountable to no one. He believes that "any good story, any good novel, should have a message, should have a purpose." In an opening parable, Achebe relates how these poems – taken from three collections, with some previously unpublished – suffered long neglect from his London publishers. Some won the commonwealth poetry prize in 1979, and others he hints garnered an underground following, happily, carcanet in the UK has now returned them to the light. Though among the bleakest, the poems on the Biafran famine reveal a personal dimension often missing from generic images. "A Mother is a Refugee camp" evokes a woman's tenderness for a son

I. Introduction

Translation plays a valuable role in the academy and beyond. Good translations can introduce scholars to new search, make works of literature and non-fiction available to new readers. Its complexity lies in being like the transfer of perfume from one bottle to another. As careful as you are, some fragrance is lost but the challenge remains to capture the essence. All things in nature are subject to change – and so is all cultural matter. Translation is always a shift, not between two languages but between the two types of cultural matter. A text, obviously written literally in one language in a given manifestation faces a multi reader & thus reaches out to a much larger base, unifying experiences & opinion as it expands. Let's remind the readings, canonical, by Paul De Man (1983) and by Jacques Derrida (1985) - whose formulations were decisive for a conceptualization of translation the way it was presented some decades later by post-structuralism. Let's recover, at least, one of the ideas that organize this document: "No Translation would be possible if its supreme aspiration would be similarity with the original. Because in its survival – that should not be called this way unless it means evolution and the renovation all living things have to go through – the original is modified" (Benjamin, 2007:81).

Chinua Achebe (pronounced *Chee-noo-ah Ah-chay-bay*) is considered by many critics and teachers to be the most influential African writer of his generation. His writings, including the novel *Things Fall Apart*, have introduced readers throughout the world to creative uses of language and form, as well as to factual inside accounts of modern African life and history. Not only through his literary contributions but also through his championing of bold objectives for Nigeria and Africa, Achebe has helped reshape the perception of African history, culture, and place in world affairs.

Achebe was born in the Igbo (formerly spelled *Ibo*) town of Ogidi in eastern Nigeria on November 16, 1930, the fifth child of Isaiah Okafor Achebe and Janet Iloegbunam Achebe. His father was an instructor in Christian catechism for the Church Missionary Society. Nigeria was a British colony during Achebe's early years, and educated English-speaking families like the Achebes occupied a privileged position in the Nigerian power structure. His parents even named him Albert, after Prince Albert, the husband of Queen Victoria of Great Britain. (Achebe himself chose his Igbo name when he was in college.)

Achebe attended the Church Missionary Society's school where the primary language of instruction for the first two years was Igbo. At about eight, he began learning English. His relatively late introduction to English allowed Achebe to develop a sense of cultural pride and an appreciation of his native tongue — values that may not have been cultivated had he been raised and taught exclusively in English. Achebe's home fostered his understanding of both cultures: He read books in English in his father's library, and he spent hours listening to his mother and sister tell traditional Igbo stories. In addition to his writing career, Achebe maintained an active teaching career. In 1972, he was appointed to a three-year visiting professorship at the University of

Massachusetts at Amherst and, in 1975, to a one-year visiting professorship at the University of Connecticut. In 1976, with matters sufficiently calm in Nigeria, he returned as professor of English at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with which he had been affiliated since 1966. In 1990, he became the Charles P. Stevenson, Jr., professor of literature at Bard College, Annandale, New York.

Achebe received many awards from academic and cultural institutions around the world. In 1959, he won the Margaret Wong Memorial Prize for *Things Fall Apart*. The following year, after the publication of its sequel, *No Longer At Ease*, he was awarded the Nigerian National Trophy for Literature. His book of poetry, *Christmas in Biafra*, written during the Nigerian civil war, won the first Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1972. More than twenty universities in Great Britain, Canada, Nigeria, and the United States have awarded Achebe honorary degrees. Achebe died on March 21, 2013, he was 82.

The first novel of Achebe's, *Things Fall Apart*, is recognized as a literary classic and is taught and read everywhere in the English-speaking world. The novel has been translated into at least forty-five languages and has sold several million copies. A year after publication, the book won the Margaret Wong Memorial Prize, a major literary award. For 21 years between his fourth novel *A Man of the People* (1966), and the booker – shortlisted *Ant Hills of the savannah* (1987) he wrote mainly poetry, as well as short stories, essays and children's books. He has said he regards all genres equally, but he may also have been deflected from the long haul of fiction by personal and political turmoil. Falsely accused by complicity in a coup plot, he fled, amid anti – Igbo programs, to his home state of Igbo land on the eve of its breakaway bid as Biafra.

Like many other African writers, Achebe believes that artistic and literary works must deal primarily with the problems of society. He has said that "art is, and always was, at the service of man" rather than an end in itself, accountable to no one. He believes that "any good story, any good novel, should have a message, should have a purpose." In an opening parable, Achebe relates how these poems – taken from three collections, with some previously unpublished – suffered long neglect from his London publishers. Some won the commonwealth poetry prize in 1979, and others he hints garnered an underground following, happily, carcanet in the UK has now returned them to the light.

Much of Achebe's poetry reflects both the searing disillusionment of this era, and his own peculiar wisdom and transcendence. Several poems, Achebe writes by way of preface, "surged from the depths bring pain – seeking solace in the breach and darkness of civil war" – a fact underlined by two of the book's sections: *Poems about war and poems not about war*. His failure to persuade others against the violence is reflected in "1966", written just after the quelling of Biafran secession, in which he sees the "absent minded" descent into war as a "diamond – tripped drill point" delving towards the "rare artesian hatred that once squirted warm blood in God's face confirming His first disappointment in Eden".

Though among the bleakest, the poems on the Biafran famine reveal a personal dimension often missing from generic images. "A Mother is a Refugee camp" evokes a woman's tenderness for a son

"She soon would have to forget,

She took from their bundle of possessions

A broken comb and combed The rust colored hair left on his skull"- a once mundane act new akin to "putting flowers on tiny grave".

Mother has always held a supreme position in all religions. In Islam, she holds the first and second places. In Hinduism, the mother and motherland are deemed greater than heaven. In Christianity, the privilege of "giving birth divinely" was also handed over to a woman. A Madonna and child is a religious painting of Jesus Christ and Mary, his mother. And it's a generic painting. So all the great Renaissance painters tended to paint religious paintings; Christ on the cross, Last Suppers, and they all do one Madonna and child, one picture of Jesus Christ and his mother, the infant Christ and his mother. Madonna and child with Mary scowling down at the child. What Achebe is saying here is that the best painters the world has ever seen, painting a picture of a mother looking at her child, all of the best painters in the world, none of them have ever been able to capture the look of tenderness that he sees on this woman in a refugee camp. The image of *Madonna with her child* is supposed to be the highest paradigm of motherboard one can envisage. Here, China Achebe states that even that image could not surpass the picture of a mother expressing tenderness for a son, she would soon have to forget. It is the most poignant picture one's imagination and memory can ever record.

However amused or scornful, the poet is never lofty or detached. An unembittered moral clarity gives these poems their simple directness. Christian imagery from Judas to Lazarus, combines with Igbo proverbs and beliefs – some of which Achebe explain in end notes. But most images are grounded in everyday activity. This poem is stamped by that often painful experience and a life time's reflection on it.

This poem is titled "Refugee Mother and child". The adjective 'refugee' has different meanings in this context. One, the mother in questions may be a refugee. Besides, one who feels from danger, and is in a secure and protective circle is also called a 'refugee'. In this regards, the baby is a refugee, and his refugee is his mother's womb till he comes out to this cruel world. Another inter protection would be the mother finding refugee from the reality of the death of her son in a make – believe world.

The air held nausea of unwashed children with traces of diarrhea and the stench of the emanations post – delivery. The rawness of the struggle to attain motherhood is depicted as the poet states:

The air was heavy with odors
Of diarrhea of unwanted children
With washed – out ribs and dried – up
Bottoms struggling in labored
Steps behind blown empty bellies.(4-5)

'Blown empty bellies' denotes that the stomachs which have become inflated with air in these times of intense malnutrition. And the way that Achebe presents this sentence to us makes the sentence very difficult to read.

So, presumably as his eye roams over the situation that he sees, Mothers there had long ceased to care, as the poignancy of the situation of the refugees had reached their saturation. But this one still held her own. She donned a ghost smile. The situation is scary because the new – born is dead and the smile seems ghostly. The turn 'ghost smile' may also imply that the lady held 'a ghost' of a smile that once was real. Now that there is a genuine reason for the smile', her eyes also looked super focused as it held the ghost of a mothers pride. She combs, with maternal affection, the hair on his 'skull'. Note that it is 'skull' and not 'head' as the baby is impoverished, and dead. Her eyes appeared to sing a lullaby, as she parts the son's hair. In an otherwise situation, this act would be of little consequence; another everyday affair before the breakfast or school. Here, however of maternal affection and is therefore equivalent to "putting flowers on a tiny grave" (20). So first of the thing that she did was like 'putting flowers on a tiny grave'. What is the 'it' that she is doing? And the 'it' is combing her son's hair. She used to do this just before she sent her son to school. Now she did it 'like putting flowers on a tiny grave'. I think this is such a good line firstly, because it works very well literally. Never mind the figurative beauty of it. One can imagine the motions of putting flowers on a tiny grave, that is the same motion that one can imagine the mother combing the child's hair with. Obviously, she's combing his hair as a way of saying goodbye to him because he is dead. Achebe tells us 'in another life this must have been a little daily act of no consequence before his breakfast and school'. Now, what does he mean by 'in another life'? because there are three possibilities for that. In the first one, 'in another life', would be reincarnation, wouldn't it? The Buddhist belief in reincarnation, that our souls are born again. So, if the mother were to be born again, or had been born again in another life, this would be the sort of thing, this combing of the hair before the boy goes off to school, this would be this daily act of no consequence. That's what she would do in another life, a reincarnated life. Another interpretation of that line 'in another life', is in a world properly run, where what has caused this situation to happen didn't happen in a properly-run world. So it's almost, as if it means in another world, this would be a daily act of no consequence. And that's plausible. But the one I think is most plausible and the one I like best is, in a world before this event happened, because refugee mothers aren't born refugee mothers. They become refugees; mothers become refugees by whatever flood, war, whatever disaster, man-made or otherwise, has caused them to have to flee and seek refuge. So this refugee mother wasn't a refugee mother before the disaster of Biafra occurred. And the life that she led before that disaster was so different from the life that she leads now, it might as well have been another life. This is the rewritten version poem: A Mother in A Refugee Camp

*No Madonna and Child could touch
Her tenderness for a son
She soon would have to forget....
The air was heavy with odours of diarrhoea,
Of unwashed children with washed-out ribs
And dried-up bottoms waddling in laboured steps
Behind blown-empty bellies. Other mothers there
Had long ceased to care, but not this one:
She held a ghost-smile between her teeth,
And in her eyes the memory
Of a mother's pride....She had bathed him
And rubbed him down with bare palms.
She took from their bundle of possessions
A broken comb and combed
The rust-colored hair left on his skull
And then humming in her eyes began carefully to part it.
In their former life this was perhaps
A little daily act of no consequence
Before his breakfast and school; now she did it
Like putting flowers on a tiny grave.*

The anthologized version of Chinua Achebe's poem : *Refugee Mother and Child*.

*No Madonna and Child could touch
that picture of a mother's tenderness
for a son she soon would have to forget.
The air was heavy with odours
of diarrhoea of unwashed children
with washed-out ribs and dried-up
bottoms struggling in laboured
steps behind blown empty bellies. Most
mothers there had long ceased
to care but not this one; she held
a ghost smile between her teeth
and in her eyes the ghost of a mother's
pride as she combed the rust-coloured
hair left on his skull and then -
singing in her eyes - began carefully
to part it...In another life this
must have been a little daily
act of no consequence before his
breakfast and school; now she
did it like putting flowers
on a tiny grave.*

So, of the changes there, we are given more information on the way the mother We are told that she is humming in her eyes, where previously she had been singing. And this is important because we can hum in a much more melancholy way than we can be singing. And, the ambiguity in the final line about what 'in another life' could mean, is cleared up for us. Achebe tells us, 'in a former life'. Although I prefer the ambiguity of the different meanings, presumably Achebe doesn't and he wants us to know specifically that this woman he sees in the refugee camp, before she was there she was not a refugee mother. Refugee mothers aren't born as refugee mothers, and that particular confusion is cleared up for us, presumably because Achebe himself doesn't want that confusion. But the most telling difference that Achebe makes in his relatively slight rewriting of the poem is in the title. The poem that is most often anthologized is called *Refugee Mother and Child*. The rewritten version is called *A Mother in a Refugee Camp*. Now, the reason he makes this change is because to call someone a 'refugee mother' means she is a refugee before she is a mother. If you call the poem *A Mother in a Refugee Camp*, she is a mother who happens to be in a refugee camp. And the second title is much more respectful of the woman who is in those circumstances. She is a mother with a child, in a refugee camp; she isn't a refugee mother with a child. This is Achebe's most famous poem; it's one that's often anthologized. When he wrote it as a young man, he didn't realize what a famous poem it was going to become. So, due to its fame, he rewrote it in a later anthology, tweaking two or three moments of it.

Let's recover, at least, one of the ideas that organize this document: All things in nature are subject to change – and so is all cultural matter. Translation is always a shift, not between two languages but between the two types of cultural matter. “No Translation would be possible if its supreme aspiration would be similarity with the original. Because in its survival – that should not be called this way unless it means evolution and the renovation all living things have to go through – the original is modified” (Benjamin , 2007:81). Chinua Achebe's poem *A Refugee Mother And Child* reflects not only the poignant situation of the refugees but also the love and the motherly affection towards the dead child. It also brings out the similarities and the dissimilarities caused as a result of translation.

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