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Language is a reflection of culture. And writers of African background, when writing in English, maintain a distinct African style. The importance of the word in the African oral tradition has carried over into the literary work of Black writers throughout the world.

In the United States, the focus on Black Americans' nonstandard language over the past 10 years has been on differences in grammar and phonology of vernacular Black English and standard English, the *lingua franca* of America and several other countries. Such studies have largely neglected the wide range of Black language, and, because they have not recognized such a range, these studies have not examined the features of Black language which, traceable to the cultural preferences, are found along all points of the continuum of the language of the Black community. The Black linguist, Richard Wright, argues: "... by focusing on nonstandard data, linguists have indirectly promoted a distorted view about the true range of varieties and competencies of Blacks as a speech community." (1975).

Style is an area that overlaps dialect varieties in the community. Those aspects of style traceable to an African cultural base are found in the speech and writing of Blacks throughout the language community. Though initially part of the oral tradition, basic African stylistic features have carried over into writing.

Senegal's Leopold Senghor, at the First Conference of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris in 1956, noted that image and rhythm are the fundamental features of African style. "Any language is wearisome that does not utilize the key-words, the African image. The Negro does not understand such a language. ... The European is empiric, the African is mystic and metaphysical.... The words are always pregnant with images." Senghor's remarks apply not only to Africans but to those of African descent throughout the world.

Basil Matthews, a scholar of international posture now living in Trinidad, has devoted a great deal of his research activity to identifying and describing the realization of the symbolic image in the works of Black scholars from a wide variety of disciplines. His research goes a step beyond mere stylistic descriptions in that he links the use of the symbolic image to a cultural preference in cognitive process; that is, Blacks prefer to think in images. Writing in the April 1977 issue of *New Directions,* Matthews noted:

> *... in Black use the thought is generated through the use of a picture concept (visualization) rather than through the use of ... theoretical statement. ... In Black imagery, a picture of the thing as it really exists is put before the mind and imagination. In the Black method, one proceeds through visual thinking as against non-visual thinking ... in Black use thought is a living thing .. p16).*

Further in the article, Matthews lists some of the "major patterns of difference between Black and standard Western usage of symbolic imagery." Imagery in Black language is "not a matter of occasion but a matter of routine"; the use of imagery in Black language is "intensely affective; its affectivity is a directive or culturally patterned affectivity and not mere happenstance"; the use of imagery in Black language is "oriented to conceptualize and to define rather than to seduce or to cosmetize"; the use of imagery in Black language "introduces the self into the objective analysis of objects, events or ideas," and the use of imagery in Black language "mediates a wholeness approach or a cosmic approach to learning." (p18)

Following the Aristotelian ideal expounded in the *Rhetorica,* the Western tradition has dictated that imagery, except in [illegible] amounts, properly belongs to poetry—or at most to "creative writing"; the Black aesthetic says imagery belongs to all writing. An examination of the works of a Black American scholar writing a nonfiction sociological work, an African writing a novel, and a West Indian writing an autobiography will illustrate the Black use of imagery.

Sociologist Nathan Hare writes not as a poet nor as a novelist, playwright or short story writer; he writes as a social commentator and analyst, yet his work is permeated with imagery.

Hare authored *The Black Anglo-Saxons* a few years back to pinpoint how the evils of racism in the United States have led many Blacks to renounce their roots. He expresses his thoughts through the symbolic image: a reflection of the substance of the preference of Blacks for the use of imagery in all types of writing. By looking at the organization of the book as a whole and by concentrating in depth on one chapter, it becomes evident how the use of symbolic image permeates Hare's writing.

The title, *The Black Anglo-Saxons,* is an example of symbolic imagery. It is figurative language, the oxymoron. *Oxymoron* is a figure of speech in which a seeming self-contradiction or apparent absurdity has in context a pointed meaning. Hare uses the image in several ways: Identification — showing whom he is speaking of; discrimination — separating the *Black* Anglo-Saxons from other Blacks and other Anglo-Saxons; classification — these are Black, not purple, pink or green Anglo-Saxons, not Black militants or colored folk; judgment — Black and Anglo-Saxon are in polarity, to classify one by the other implies that something is amiss and out of its orbit.

In choosing chapter headings, Hare uses metaphors and simple descriptive comparisons to define by comparing Blacks who adopt white standards and values to the type of persons indicated in his titles. The following defining-comparing titles are used to divide the work: "The Dignitaries: Eunuch Leaders"; "The Dignitaries: The Powerful and the Glorious"; "The Image-Makers"; "The Mimics"; "The Cultured"; "The Supercitizens"; "The

Pioneers"; and other similar titles. Of 12 chapter headings, 9 are metaphors and 3 are simple descriptions. All are images.

An analysis of the first chapter further illustrates the use of the image. The title is "The Dignitaries: Eunuch Leaders." In making an analogy of certain Blacks to eunuch leaders, Hare is saying that these Blacks are impotent slaves whose leadership is illusionary. As eunuchs were often in charge of the harems of ancient rulers, so one may infer that these Black dignitaries are in fact only the leaders of those as helpless and powerless as the women of the harems. Hare's overall analogy is defined by lesser images. He defines and redefines, through symbolic imagery, using definition through image as a means of analyzing and evaluating. This is shown in his description of the eunuch leaders: "The influence of these dignitary 'power-wielders' is easily undermined.... As eunuch leaders, they must be content with a pawnshop power, acquired by their readiness to peddle the Negro's welfare for white favor."

To the overall metaphor of the chapter, Hare lays on other metaphors and figurative language of other types to describe these Black Anglo-Saxons in more and more detail through refinement of the image. It is as though his mind is a montage of images which together symbolize the Black Anglo-Saxons. Again, he writes: "... at best, they serve as electric contacts in the circuit of white-Negro polarity."

In the Western tradition, a switch from "eunuchs" to "electric contact" would constitute a mixed metaphor, one to be avoided. However, Hare draws upon even more images to refine his ideas, to explain his overall thesis to the reader. The images, while inherently defining, are used to refine the broader analogy. As the explanation continues, still another image comes forth: "Set apart from other Negroes, they are led (and misled) by white remote control." In other words, the Black Anglo-Saxon is depicted as a robot, who, in reality, is controlled by someone else. What the Western tradition calls ineffective, the mixed metaphor, actually acts to reinforce the overall idea of powerlessness.

In analyzing the relationships between the Black Anglo-Saxons and whites, Hare also has evaluated these relationships: "Many are 'window-dressing' Negroes, selected for token or symbolic positions by white politicians seeking to capture, retrieve, or retain Negro allegiance." Here, the dignitary is pictured as a mannequin, a dummy, a figure used for show with no worth except as a showpiece for the work of others.

Once more, we have an image that illustrates several cognitive processes at its genesis: comparison, identification, classification, definition, evaluation, and discrimination. The images used are not embellishments; rather they are the message, the carriers of the content. Because the very title of the chapter is a metaphor, one can say that each word is an explanation and extension of the image of the eunuch, and thus, part of the image's projection. Taking a page in isolation, however, one sees by count how pervasive the imagery is. Half of the 16 sentences — 369 words — contain images projected in metaphor and other figurative language. Of the remaining half of the sentences, two contain quotations from Black Anglo-Saxons, who, despite disavowal of things Black, have projected an image of themselves by choosing, in this case, the name *Elks*. *Elks* projects a double image: the one of member having the finer traits of the elk, the other of "the Negro" who apes his white counterparts by establishing similar organizations. The final six sentences that do not use figurative language still use imagery in the form of figurative composition — as aspect of symbolic imagery identified by Basil Matthews. Narrative is used in five of the six sentences in question. The sixth sentence, the rephrasing of a statement by an Elk leader, uses another form of figurative composition, the description.

Even though every sentence is not in itself an image, the entire book forms an overall analogy and figurative thought. Composition is apparent even where the more easily recognizable figurative language may not appear. Thoughout his work, Hare calls upon narrative. As a case in point, he uses the following story to define and judge the Black Anglo-Saxon's actions;

> *When working class Negroes in Harlem boycotted stores... because of their unfair treatment, Jackie Robinson chastised them for 'anti-Semitism'. When the boycotters later picketed the company for which Robinson works with signs such as 'Who made Jackie Robinson a judge over us?,' they were widely denounced by other Negro leaders, who managed to stop competing with one another long enough to put down this impudent insurrection. To criticize constructively any given act of a 'responsible' leader or his organization brings down Black Anglo-Saxon... wrath,"*

Hare has made a scathing condemnation of Black Anglo-Saxon actions by his choice of story and sneering words. All supporting details for his thesis project images. He sees and feels a certain type of Black man, and everything he writes serves to project that image. The images carry the message rather than merely embellish it. His discrimination is evidenced throughout the book as he carefully selects the appropriate form to carry his meaning. However, the selection is not between image and non-image, but among different forms of images. As a case in point, he uses the figurative composition form of descriptive analysis: "About the only place anyone will follow the average dignitary leader is to a banquet hall or ballroom." And again, "At the same time, they run begging, apologizing, and whimpering to white people for help, which suggests an incapacity to accomplish their own program."

Even in the selection of quotations from others to include in his work, Hare chooses those statements that project images. But one can not overlook the fact that in choosing quotations from other Blacks, if the hypothesis holds true, he would find a multitude of images to choose from. For instance:

> *"'It was not surprising', wrote journalist-theologian Dean Gordon Hancock, 'that*

the Jericho walls of segregation did not fall as we hoped and expected . . . Burley went on to observe that the Black Anglo-Saxon breed of Negro seems more determined to shed his black skin in 'America's melting pot' (Malcolm X says the Negro has been in the pot for 400 years and still hasn't melted) than with establishing any sustained self-improvement in the true sense. We will march through Dixie, the way Sherman did . . . The Washington Afro-American *has defined a Black Anglo-Saxon 'moderate' as 'an animal who can shuffle his feet and keep his eyes on the ground when he's talking to white people, and at the same time stand up before colored people and demand immediate racial equality.'"*

Thoughout the 15 pages of chapter one, Hare chooses 20 direct or indirect quotations from others to further clarify and reinforce his analogy. All are images expressed in figurative language, usually metaphor, or through the figurative composition form of descriptive analysis. To count Hare's own images would be to count every thought in the book. The inescapable fact is that the book is an image; the image is the format. The book is a reflection of the Black writer's preference for imagery in writing.

Much detail has gone into the discussion of Hare's work because it is nonfiction, the type of work where one — coming from a Western ideal — would not expect to find such copious use of metaphor and other examples of imagistic language. Turning to fiction, one sees the traditional African form, the proverb, given extensive use. While the Eastern tradition would perhaps "allow" use of some imagery in fiction forms, the proverb is not frequently seen in modern Western fiction.

Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe uses proverbs not just to add authenticity and "flavor" to his novels but as inescapable parts of the pattern of communicating the tone of the work. In the essay "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation" (1973), he wrote: ". . . for an African writing in English is not without its serious setback. He finds himself describing situations or modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in the English way of life." This relates to Matthews' previously mentioned discussion of the use of imagery in Black writing.

Achebe uses the proverb as an expression of that thought mode and as an attempt to communicate the connotative aspects of African life, not merely as an adornment to his writing. The proverb is a key element of oral African literature. Its teaching characteristics are inherent in its short literary form, which sometimes may be expressed in a precise word. It is a stable form not influenced by a performer's variations as other oral forms such as poetry may be. It is a carrier of the philosophy and the thought patterns of culture, thus, its use carries levels of meaning apart from its primary message.

The proverb may be applied in any situation where it may fit. The image it gives is both stable and fluctuating—a generalized stable message clothed in the garb of the particular application. When Achebe says that Obi Okonkwo's father (in *No Longer At Ease*) often uses proverbs, one has an image of a particular kind of man. When Obi rejects everything about his father except on a particular proverb — "a man who lives on the banks of the Niger should not wash his hands with spittle" — the reader has the image not just of the character of the father but of the ties to traditional culture that are still part of Obi's cognitive system though he has been through Western schooling, travel, and holds a job based on the Western tradition. For all the conflicts Obi finds between the old and the new, the European and the traditional African lifestyles, his traditional teachings are still part of his approach to life. All this information is succinctly summarized in the reference to the proverb.

As Leopold Senghor said: "The African Negro image is . . . not an equation-image, but an analogy-image, a surrealist image. The African Negro has a horror of the straight line and the false 'right word'. Two and two do not make four, but 'five' in the words of the poet Aimé Césaire. The object does not signify what it represents, but what it suggests, what it creates. The elephant is Strength, the spider, Prudence; horns are the Moon, and the Moon is Fertility. Every representation is an image . . . " (1956)

The Niger is not just a river or a location, but a lifestyle, the African heritage; having had access to its flowing clear waters, one need not turn for "cleanliness" to the corrupt forms of the European lifestyle. Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* is fully salted with proverbs. Again, these forms carry varying levels of meaning in the varying images they provide in the readers' minds. For example:

> *Do not be in a hurry to rush into the pleasure of the world like the young antelope who danced herself lame when the main dance was yet to come . . . An only palm fruit does not get lost in the fire . . . The fox must be chased away first; after that the hen might be warned against wandering into the bush . . . if you want to eat a toad you should look for a fat juicy one . . . A person who has not secured a place on the floor should not begin to look for a mat.*

Each of these and the many more in the book advance the story; they do not merely decorate it.

Virginia Newsome (1978) in discussing another of Achebe's novels, *Things Fall Apart,* notes Achebe's own explanation for the use of many proverbs in his work: "Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten." Newsome goes on to state: "Achebe uses the proverb to paraphrase ideas and to explain traditions of the culture . . . . They succinctly relate a message while making a point which concludes something: a conservation, a section, or a scene . . . are devices for carrying through a theme."

A brief look at the West Indian writer, George Lamming, will illustrate that the use of Black imagery is found in the writing of Blacks from different parts of the world. The style is carried by Blacks wherever they go. Abraham Chapman notes: "George Lamming defined Black as 'synonymous with

originating in Africa' .... The Black aesthetic ... is an aesthetic of African origin which evolved in its own ways in the course of interaction with other cultures and aesthetics as Black people inhabited larger stretches of the world outside Africa." (p. 12, 1973).

Lamming's adaptation of the Black aesthetic — Black imagery — is, in the words of novelist Richard Wright, writing in the introduction to Lamming's autobiography *In the Castle of My Skin*, "... a charged and poetic prose ... Lamming's story ... is ... a *symbolic* repetition of the story of millions .... Lamming's quietly melodious prose is faithful not only to social detail, but renders with fidelity the myth content of folk minds, paints lovingly the personalities of boyhood friends; sketches authentically the characters of schoolmasters and village merchants, and depicts the moods of an adolescent boy in an adolescent society ..." (pp. v-vi).

Lamming, like Hare, makes extensive use of metaphor. He draws his images from nature. At the very opening of the work, one is met with the image of rain, rain turning to flood, as symbol of the feeling, the occurrence, the totality of the lives of the people of the village. Lamming's words carry a feeling level as well as a content level — the affectivity spoken of by Matthews. One senses in this use of affective metaphor, the "poetic" form of the Western mind which is the common prose form of the African mind:

> *Rain, Rain, Rain ... my mother put her head through the window to let the neighbors know that I was nine, and they flattered me with the consolation that my birthday had brought showers of blessing. The morning laden with cloud soon passed into noon, and the noon neutral and silent into the sodden grimness of an evening that waded through water. That evening I kept an eye on the crevices of our wasted roof where the colour of the shingles had turned to mourning black, and waited for the weather to rehearse my wishes. But the evening settled on the slush of the roads that dissolved into pools of clay, and I wept for the watery waste of my ninth important day. . . .From a window where the spray had given the sill a little wet life I watched the water ride through the lanes and alleys that multiplied behind the barrack .... The white stalks of the lily lay flat under the hammering rain .... The water rose higher and higher until the fern and flowers on our verandah were flooded. It came through the creases of the door, and expanded across the uncarpeted borders of the floor. My mother brought sacks that absorbed it quickly, but overhead the crevices of the roof were weeping rain. . . .No one seemed to notice how the noon had passed to evening, the evening to night; nor to worry that the weather played me false. Nothing mattered but the showers of blessing and the eternal will of the water's source. And I might have accepted the consolation if it weren't that the floods had chosen to follow me in the celebration of all my years, evoking the image of those legendary waters which had once risen to set a curse on the course of man .... As if in serious imitation of the waters that raced outside, our lives — meaning our fears and their corresponding ideals — seemed to escape down an imaginary drain that was my future. Our capacity for feeling had grown as large as the flood but the prayers of a simple village seemed as precariously adequate as the houses hoisted on water ... (pp. i-2).*

This first extended image sets the tone of Lamming's work and at once conveys concrete denotative information and, through the metaphor, affective or connotative information.

There is no space here to examine all the images in Lamming's work. The extensive quotation from the opening serves to illustrate the pervasiveness of image in metaphor, including personification, "plain" description and other image-provoking forms. For example, a pebble (pp. 236-239) became a symbol of a precious object, one we may seek and never possess: "One of those things one can't bear to see for the last time"; the pebble is then more than a pebble. Lamming, though writing narrative, is writing nonfiction. Again, the pervasive images would be discouraged in standard Western writing but effectively — and affectively — carry the content in the work of writers of African descent.

The use of imagery by Black people indeed effectively communicates; even readers from other backgrounds who may not perceive the entire message cannot miss the "different" tone brought about by the stylistic preference for the image.

As the world's communication patterns in writing become more alike, it is not necessary to lose all cultural differences. As an old Caribbean proverb states: "No everybody ride him jackass same fashion." □

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