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Ash Wednesday as a Spiritual Journey to Easter: A Linguistic Study of T .S. Eliot's 'Ash Wednesday vi ', George Herbert's 'from Easter' and Wole Soyinka's 'Easter'.

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ABSTRACT

The linguistic approach to the study of literary works has proved to be vibrant and all embracing. Noam Chomsky with his introduction of Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) has provided a theory on which successful studies of the language of literary works are based. This is the case of this paper which examined the language use in three poems namely: 'Ash Wednesday' by T. S. Eliot, 'from Easter' by George Herbert and 'Easter' by Wole Soyinka. This paper forges a spiritual link for the poems, proving that the Ash Wednesday starts a spiritual journey to Easter, by using the levels of linguistic analysis as provided by the theory of Transformational Generative Grammar. The linguistic levels used are graphology, phonology, syntax and lexico-semantics while the approach is comparative. The paper finds out that while Eliot vehemently emphasizes absolute withdrawal from the empty worldly life and rededication to the divine, Herbert anticipates the great joys that Easter brings along with it, especially for anyone who has devotedly 'suffered' with Christ during the period of forty days started by Ash Wednesday, whereas Wole Soyinka, in his poem 'Easter', admires the figure who laid His life to save mankind from damnation but chides Christ's followers for their lack of good behaviour and lack of reciprocity for their redemption. He insistently accuses many Christians of merely ritualising the feast of Easter by watching the children wave their palm fronds in commemoration of Easter, without having a deep thought of its significance. He expresses his feelings with disgust, and hopes the followers of Christ will have a re-think and change their unhealthy behaviours so as to be worthy of Christ's suffering and death for them.

Introduction

Ash Wednesday is a remarkable day which ushers in a period of stocktaking one's moral adequacies or otherwise, and a period marking a cycle of forty days of Lenten season in Christendom. It is characterised by fasting, abstinence, alms giving and prayers, to expiate the wrongs done by the individual. The practice is in tune with the re-enactment of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. This period rhymes with the forty days of Christ's fasting and prayer in the wilderness in preparation for commencing His ministry. The spiritual journey which starts from the Ash Wednesday terminates with Christ's resurrection which is marked by Easter. Easter is heralded with joy, after the forty days of mortification. The adherents of Christian religion take Christ's resurrection as the pivot of Christianity. The Ash Wednesday reminds the Christians that human beings are made from dust and unto dust they shall return at death. To practically show this, the dry fronds which were used to mark the

previous year's Palm Sunday celebration, are collected and burnt and the ashes are wetted for use on Ash Wednesday of the present year. The officiating priests and acolytes deep their fingers in the ash paste and make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the faithful saying 'Thou art dust and unto dust thou shall return'. The faithful thereafter re-enact weekly the suffering of Jesus Christ in the Stations of the Cross. All these are fashioned towards mortification of the flesh, so as to fully realise the full joy of Easter. This paper therefore examines Ash Wednesday and the period of lent in relation to the function it is expected to perform, which is, making a resolution to turn one's back to sin, amend one's ways of life, so as to partake in the joy of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As already mentioned in the abstract, the literary texts of focus in this study are: 'Ash Wednesday' by T. S . Eliot, 'from Easter' by George Herbert and 'Easter' by Wole Soyinka. The paper aims to establish that Ash Wednesday is a spiritual journey to Easter through its study of the selected poems.

Methodology

The three poems under study in this paper are T .S. Eliot's 'Ash Wednesday vi', George Herbert's 'from Easter', both taken from *The Penguin Book of English Verse* published in 1974, and Wole Soyinka's 'Easter' taken from *Idanre and Other Poems* published in 1967. These poems which are the sources of data were selected, studied and analysed based on their literary qualities and treatment of a common theme: the importance of Easter. In the course of the study, considerable attempt has been made to point out the linguistic features employed in the poems in line with the Transformational Generative Grammar theory of Noam Chomsky.

'Ash Wednesday vi' by T .S. Eliot

T.S. Eliot is a 20th century poet, who uses his poem 'Ash Wednesday vi' to show its impact on the moral life of an individual. Thematically, the persona reiterates his unwillingness to 'turn again', arising from the hopelessness of his situation. In other words, he believes that his moral life is irreparable (by repeating the adverbial clause, 'Although i do not hope to turn...'). It is obvious that the persona has derailed from an expected life style. This is so from the setting where he operates, that is, sea life which is noted for unbridled immoral life. He wavers between 'the profit and the loss' line 4. He feels he has made some 'profits' which he now compares with his losses, which can either push him to want to turn or not.

In stanza 2, the losses are becoming clearer. He is personified in 'the lost heart', which stiffens in its terrible state and at the same time rejoices in the 'loss of lilac and sea voices'. In other words, the prodigal life results in his loss of contact with sea life and activities and that makes him develop 'weak spirit' and the weak spirit 'quickness to rebel for the bent golden-rod' (lines 11-14). He regrets his state and tries to recover the 'cries of quails and the whirling plover' (which is near to nature). This desire to recover the cries of quail is a step towards repentance and retracing his steps, although he does not hope to turn'. He feels he has drifted too far away to be able to ever retrace his steps. But now the desire is rekindled in him as he recollects the indices of sea-faring. Like a sinner who lacks the moral courage 'to turn' from his bad life to a repentant life, the persona lacks such courage. He recognises his senselessness of behaviour as 'the blind eye which creates the empty forms between the ivory gates', lines 18&19.' His eye, seeing through his mind, observes that 'the ivory gates now have empty forms. In other words, his present position of reckless life, pays him no dividend; there is emptiness before him and 'smell renews the salt savour of the earth'. With this scenario, he has prepared himself for a 'turn', for which he had no hope before. With the two lines that conclude the second stanza, he takes an outright decision 'to turn again', but with assistance of a spiritual entity thus,

But when the voices shaken from the yew- tree drift away

Let the other yew be shaken and reply... lines 23 & 24

With this analogy, he advises himself that since the voices from the yew-tree drift away to no destination, or worse still, to condemnation, the other yew should be shaken and should reply. The reply is then converted to making a plea to a spiritual entity to help the voices from the yew to come out from their falsehood. The yew souls are comparatively lost souls.

In the 3rd stanza, the souls from the yew-tree, including the persona, implore the beings of the spiritual world to teach them how to lead their lives. Here the fruit of the Ash Wednesday, as in the contemporary practice in the church cycle, is achieved and that is repentance, renewal of life, changing from falsehood to truthful life even in the midst of difficulties and temptations that may face them. They plead that the spiritual beings would hearken to their cries.

Analysis

In applying the linguistic levels of analysis, the poem, at the level of graphology, has three stanzas. The whole of stanza 1 with ten lines has no full stop; rather it has just one comma at the 9th line. The second stanza has one full stop in line 24, to introduce the spiritual being to whom he directs his plea for assistance. In other words, the period could signify a point of orderliness and arrival at one's destination beginning from the time he discovered himself in

the spiritual being. Four commas are closely applied in lines 25 & 26 to mark off the list of endearing names given to the spiritual being. The 3rd stanza of 10 lines has just one full stop at the end of the tenth line, with 3 commas in lines 33 & 34. The use of capital 'H' in 'His' and capital 'T' in 'thee', can only be ascribed to the heavenly being to whom the plea is directed. The lack of adequate punctuation marks in the poem creates a reading difficulty, more so, with the heavy modification of the sentences which the poet employs. However, the poet adheres to the conventional layout of capitalisation of the first letters of each line. In all, there is not much of graphological indices that can impact on the theme.

At the level of syntax, the arrangement of the poem is as disorganised as the persona, as a result of his reckless and abused life (which he is thinking of turning again to the status quo). The adverbial clause of concession starting the first three lines thus 'Although....', does not have the main clause close to it. Rather, the main clause is recovered in the last stanza with 'Suffer me not to be separated / Let my cry come unto thee' lines 35 & 36. Grammatically, 'although' is used to introduce a statement that makes the main statement seem surprising. The main statement, which falls in the last two lines of the poem of 36 lines, gives such a surprise because, even though he does not hope to turn again, he pleads to the supernatural being to 'suffer me not to be separated and let my cry come unto thee'. The persona wants to be saved and does not want to perish, even though he is already marching along the track of condemnation. He is still surprisingly and hopelessly feeling that he cannot turn again. There is a parallel structure produced in the adverbial clause of concession thus:

Although I do not hope to turn again

Although I do not hope

Although I do not hope to turn lines 1-3

The interesting thing in this parallel structure is that the poet stylistically omits some parts of the clause, in order to demonstrate his indecision to return to the status quo in order to amend his life, yet he pleads that he would not be allowed to be separated from the supernatural being. In the first line it is written 'although I do not hope to turn again'. In the 2nd line, the persona omits the verbal phrase 'to turn again'. In the third line he leaves out the adverbial 'again.' He is so unsure of what his turning would cause him. However, it is necessary to note that the persona believes that his salvation lies in the ultimate power of the supernatural being and that is the teaching that Ash Wednesday and the period of lent has for the followers of Jesus Christ. In line 4, the gerund 'wavering' in the phrase 'wavering between the profit and loss', discloses the reason for his being undecided about 'turning again'. The next construction helps the reader to locate the place from where the persona is operating, hence

'in the brief transit where the dreams cross,' line 5. The prepositional phrase 'in the brief transit' supports the adverbial clause of place 'where the dreams cross'. This further reinforces the snare that attracts him to where all forms of euphoric activities of life converge. He further describes the situation with the phrase, 'dream-crossed twilight' that comes between 'birth and dying', line 6. Twilight is the period between day and night when one can hardly see clearly. It is still this deceitful aura that holds him captive as though he is feeling a 're-birth' while wallowing in sin or having a feeling of dying without experiencing pains. The exclamation 'Bless me Father!', line 7 in parenthesis, seems to have unconsciously escaped from his lips, hence the ironic statement that follows 'though I do not wish to wish these things'.

In lines 7-10, he recalls with nostalgia, as he looks through the wide window towards the granite shore, the activities of sea-faring which are still going on seriously. He describes those activities as 'the white sail still fly sea ward, sea ward flying, unbroken wings'. The word 'still' underscores continuity of actions. In stanza 2, he blames himself and regrets his action of derailing, by referring to himself as 'the lost heart', which 'stiffens and rejoices in the lost lilac and the lost sea voices'. The sentence 'the lost heart stiffens and rejoices', produces this pattern

The lost heart + stiffens

rejoices

The VP s 'stiffens and rejoices' are syntagmatically related to the NP 'the lost heart'. Both share antonymous relationship and so are in ironic contrast. The linguistic context can condition an item in such a way that it takes on an additional meaning. So by virtue of belonging to the same paradigm, the antonymous relationship between 'stiffens' and 'rejoices' is neutralised and both have now assumed a hybrid of meaning, sharing the general semantic feature+/complacent/ 'in his lost state'. Whether he rejoices or stiffens, both share sameness of meaning. Now 'the blind eye creates the empty forms between ivory gates'. He can now see that his reckless life is full of emptiness 'through the ivory gates of his salvation.' This point is the climax of this poem with the five lines that end stanza 2 which state:

The place of solitude where three dreams cross

Between blue rocks

But when the voices shaken from the yew-tree drift away

Let the other yew be shaken and reply

Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden

Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood lines 21- 27.

He repeats the sentence for emphasis in line 35, but with a slight change thus: 'Suffer me not to be separated / Let my cry come unto thee', lines 35 & 36. The first plea of line 27 which is 'suffer us not', in the biblical structure means, 'do not allow'. So he says, 'Do not allow us to mock ourselves with falsehood'. He now realises that he has been wallowing in falsehood. There is a change of pronoun from 'us' to 'me' in line 36, 'Suffer me not to be separated'. His earlier pronoun 'us' from the antecedent, 'voices from the yew-tree' (which he sees himself to be among) narrows down to the pronoun 'me', to show singularity and assurance to which his personal plea would be hearkened. The request of 'Teach us to care and not to care', line 28, is an irony but a crucial meaning is hidden therein. He seeks to be taught how to care for others and not to care too much for himself and for worldly affairs.

At the level of phonology there is obvious inconsistency in the rhyming pattern. This inconsistency is traceable to the wavering nature of his moral life. He manages to produce a rhyme pattern in the first stanza, in lines 4&5 with loss/cross; 'dying' rhymes with 'flying' in lines 6&9 but the two lines in between them have been denied rhyme. He jumps to stanza 2 to continue his rhyme consistently for ten lines and dashes out again with no more rhyme. The consistent rhyming pattern represents the gleeful life which the persona has engaged himself in, while the lines without rhymes represent the confusion into which the persona throws himself as a result of his immoral life style. There are a few examples of chiming of some sounds like the bilabial approximant /w/ in 'wide window' line 8, voiceless alveolar fricative/s/ in 'sails still' line 9, alveolar lateral /l/ in 'lost lilac'. These produce aesthetic effect. There are also repetition of the parallel structure of 'suffer us not to ...' line 7, 'suffer me not to ...' line 35. These produce musical effect.

At the lexico-semantic level, the poet has made a selection of words to depict the operational environment and the activities of the persona. He uses 'dreams' to mean 'aspirations;' where 'dreams cross' are places where alternatives which require making a choice converge. He uses 'dying' and 'birth' in line 20 to stand for eternal condemnation and idyllic joy, respectively. 'Sea sails' and 'seaward flying' line 9, represent an operational environment that breeds carefree life. 'Transit' in line 5 stands for the world. The word 'lost' is used more than four times in lines 11-14, to show irrecoverability of situations. It also underscores and emphasises the serious level of derailment of the moral life of the persona. 'Ivory gate' refers to the gate of salvation; blind eyes refers to spiritual assessment. The ordering of the words 'between birth and dying' in line 6, comes up at the time he is wallowing in immorality but he changes the order at the time

he desires to come to his senses to be 'between dying and birth'. One can see the change of word order, as a sign of renewal and rebirth. His repentance has been achieved with the calling of 'Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden' line 25, not to allow 'us' to mock ourselves with falsehood; to teach 'us' to care and not to care; to teach us to 'sit still' in all circumstances; to seek their peace in 'His will' lines 27-31. The persona's first choice of 'sister' in his list of endearing names, invests on him an equality of existence with the spiritual being, which is not the case. He quickly realises his position as a nonentity in comparison with the queen of the universe and the Mother of Jesus Christ. He now respectfully adds 'holy mother', 'spirit of the fountain' etc. In the various songs in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she is given endearing names like Queen of heaven, Star of the sea, Star of the ocean. With the persona's earlier plea in line 7 for Father to bless him, he now involves the Holy Mother to intercede with Father to forgive and bless him. Metaphors used by the poet include 'profit and loss' line 4, to represent achievements and failures in life, 'sails still fly seaward, seaward flying' line 9, represents the continuity of human activities especially that of sea faring; 'rocks' stand for difficulties of the world. The employment of various epithets like 'blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the river, spirit of the sea' is to capture the only hope of his salvation. The two last lines of this poem namely : 'Suffer me not to be separated and let my cry come unto thee' confirm the success of Ash Wednesday and the period of forty days of penitence, mortification, almsgiving, fasting and abstinence, as a spiritual journey which assures the joy of Easter.

'from Easter' by George Herbert

The next poem 'from Easter' by George Herbert, welcomes to the joys of Easter whoever has successfully passed through Ash Wednesday and the period of lent, by observing fast, abstinence, repentance and resolution to renew one's life for a better tomorrow. Herbert, a 17th century poet in his poem introduces the reader to the joy that Easter brings along with it. Evil weighs the doer down, and when one is relieved of that which weighs him down spiritually, by reconciling himself to his Creator again, the mind enjoys inexplicable joy. This joy is what Herbert has anticipated in his poem and expresses how Easter cannot be equated with any other normal day of the year's calendar. He recounts his preparation to welcome the risen Lord. In the 3 stanza poem, he summarises the significance of Easter. The consistency of the joy of Easter is represented by the regular four lines per stanza as well as the precision of his explanation of Easter. The first stanza shows his preparedness to welcome the resurrected Christ thus:

I got me flowers to straw thy way

I got me boughs off many a tree

But thou wast up by break of day

And brought'st thy sweets along with thee ... lines 1-4

The account of the last public appearance made by Jesus before undergoing His suffering and death was His Triumphant entry into Jerusalem, where His followers were spreading cloths and boughs of trees, on His way as he rode on an ass. The people expressed great joy as they shouted 'Hossana in the highest!' Herbert expects to witness the human form of Christ but he is surprised that Christ 'was up' at the break of day. Herbert acknowledges the effort of the sun to rise daily and give light but the 'sunns' that have ever risen cannot contest with the special sun of Easter which comes along with 'thy sweets'. In the 2nd stanza he continues to eulogise this special sun of Easter by his expression thus:

Can there be any day but this

Though many sunnes to shine endeavour?

We count three hundred but we misse:

There is but one and that one ever lines 9-12

He reiterates that there are over three hundred suns that rise in a year but there is only but one Sun, the one that rises on Easter day which is the risen Lord. It is that one ever.

Analysis

Graphologically, the layout is concise and the poem has equal number of lines per stanza. The length of the lines is even and moderate but one line juts out and is observedly longer than other lines in each stanza. It is a deliberate demonstration of the superiority of the rising sun of Easter which is the greatest of all the suns of the year. The examples of the long lines are shown below.

And brought'st thy sweets along with thee stanza1 line 4

Though he give light & th' East perfume stanza 2 line2

Though many sunnes to shine endeavour? Stanza 3 line2

Punctuation marks are well applied, but the capital G in 'Got' in line 1 of stanza 1, and the capital S of 'sunne' in line 1 of stanza 2, are deliberately applied to lay emphasis especially on

the fact that the poet got ready flowers and bough to herald the risen Lord's appearance and that He, the risen Lord, is also in the 'sunnes' that rise in the East. The spellings presented in the poem are understandably so because of the spellings and grammar that were in vogue in the 17th century. There are such spellings as 'wast' for was, 'brought'st' for brought, 'thy' and 'thee' for your and you respectively, 'sunne' for sun, 'misse' for miss.

Phonologically, the poet has made efforts to give a consistent pattern of alternate rhymes throughout the poems thus: way/day, tree/thee, East/contest, perfume/resume, this/misse, endeavour/ ever. This adds to the beauty of melody in the poem. It also underscores the joy of Easter, which is the theme of the poem.

At the syntax level, the arrangement of words is akin to the language of the century e.g. ' I got me flowers...' ' I got me boughs...', lines 1&2. However, there is parallelism in the structure ' I got me' because they are syntactic equivalents with similar patterns thus NP1+V+OBJ +NP2. The arrangement of the sentences produces simple, compound and complex sentences in order to drive his message home to his readers ; for example , ' I got me flowers to straw thy way.' (simple sentence, line 1); ' We count three hundred, but we misse' (compound sentence, line 11). 'Can there be any day but this, though many sunnes to shine endeavour?' (complex sentence , lines 9 & 10). The word 'but' is used both as conjunctive co-ordinator as well as to produce contrast, for example, the poet claims in the first two sentences that he has 'got flowers to straw his way' and in another simple sentence, he has also 'got boughs off many trees' for the same purpose, only to arrive "but' thou wast up by break of day'. By his rising early, the items collected to honour him with are no more useful. The 'but' in this sentence functions as a co-ordinator as well as produces a contrast to his proposal. The conjunction 'although' plays a vital role of making the previous sentence less important thus:

The Sunne arising in the East

Though he give light, & th' East perfume lines 5& 6

The next syntactic arrangement is a complex sentence with an adverbial clause of condition which is negated by the main clause thus:

If they should offer to contest

With thy rising, they presume lines 7&8.

The poet uses this complex sentence to compare the normal suns that rise daily in the East, with the rising of the crucified Jesus and if the suns should offer to contest, they presume; (that is they suppose that theirs is greater; but it is not and they have no proof). In other words, the

rising 'Sunne' of Easter is superior to the daily rising sun. The poet supports his claim with a rhetorical question in the next lines:

Can there be any day like this

Though many sunnes to show endeavour? lines 9-10

There is the use of pronouns without antecedents. Such pronouns are: 'thy', 'thou', 'thy', 'thee'. The absence of the antecedents show that the pronouns are preserved for a known personality, which is Jesus Christ. To underscore this, the other forms of modern pronouns such as 'me', 'he', 'they', 'we', in lines 1, 2, 6, 7, 8 & 11 are used for insignificant nouns or antecedents. The conjunction 'but' is used four times, to show contrast between Easter and the other days of the year.

At the lexico-semantic level, words that show celebration of Easter abound; for example, flowers, boughs, arising, sweets as goodies that go along with celebration of a feast. 'Many sunnes' (line 10) takes the place of days of the year. The Easter is reckoned as 'one and that one ever' line 12. 'Three hundred' (line 11) represents the three hundred and sixty five days in a calendar year. In summary, George Herbert has used his poem 'Easter' to show the significance of Easter in the spiritual life in Christendom and the anticipation and reward of Easter to the faithful who observe thoroughly the period of lent which starts with Ash Wednesday.

'Easter' by Wole Soyinka

After Herbert's poem, in which he sees Easter as the greatest of all 'sunnes' and days of the year, the next poem to be examined in this paper is Wole Soyinka's 'Easter'. Soyinka in this poem has a critical view about the unmatched behaviours of many followers of Christ towards the essence of Easter. He re-evaluates the reciprocity by Christians, of the sufferings that were undergone by Christ, because to him (the poet) many Christians hypocritically turn their backs to the repentance and resolution they had made during the Ash Wednesday and the season of lent to be of good behaviour, as soon as the feast of Easter is over. Soyinka seriously asks what becomes of the Christians after Easter. Do they throw away the joy that Easter brings to the wind so soon or do they retain the meaning of Christ's sufferings and death, so as to always avoid making jest of his sacrifice by living in sin thereafter?

Analysis

Applying the linguistic levels of analysis starting with the graphological, the poem structurally has 8 stanzas unevenly punctuated with consistent three lines per stanza except at the last stanza where the poet summarises his opinion of the Easter celebration by the Christians seeing it derisively as children centred. The one day preceding Easter is described as 'this slow day dies', line 1. Practically the Holy Saturday is characterised by shades of silence, 'wordless wilt', line 1, awaiting the reaping of joy from Christ's suffering, which manifests on Easter day. In stanza 2, the pollen wings which bear the fruit to be reaped are said to be 'thorned' (line 4). The people who are the beneficiaries of the suffering and imminent death on the cross are described as 'hard mangoes which green-drop'; that is, they are not receptive of the suffering of He who brings to them the expected joy. The hard mangoes green-drop; that is, they are not ripe as they give their ears to the message about God. Rather, they become 'coquettes', line 8, 'to the future decadence' line 9. They flirt to bad behaviours later; that is after the joys of Easter. The poet asks the adherents who are the 'bringer of these frangipanes of Easter crops' in line 13, a rhetorical question thus:

Do we not truly fear to bleed? We hunt
 Pale tissues of the palm, fingers groping
 Ever cautious on the crown lines10-12

The poet chides the Christians that they do not appreciate the painful act of bleeding. Instead, what they do annually is to 'hunt pale tissues of palm' being cautious of the thorns(which he refers to as crown) as they pluck these pale palm fronds. The colour of palm fronds used for this occasion is usually not the green healthy ones but the pale coloured tender ones depicting the lifeless blood- lacking victim that finally dies from profuse bleeding, in order to give joy to the world. The poet does not exclude himself from this surface and insincere show of shallow feeling. The poet takes his stand about this show of insincerity and bursts into another rhetorical question even though it is structured like a statement thus: ' One bough to slake a million? Decay caulks earth's centre, spurned we pluck bleached petals for the dreamer's lair' (lines 16-18). The poet wonders how a person 'one bough' can quench or crumble the decay which seals the earth's centre. He confesses that as he sees children bear the gift-palm fronds passively, he rejects that shallow show of insincerity. He bursts out thus: ' I rode my winged ass and raged'; that is , he drove past them in anger.

Syntactically, there are pictorial images in lines 10-12. As they hunt the pale tissues of the palm, 'fingers grope cautiously on the crown,' because the tender pale fronds are positioned in

the centre of the green palm fronds with strong spikes lined along the two sides of the palm fronds, such that whoever must pluck them must grope to avoid the hand being punctured by the hard thorns. There is wilful distortion of the order of words; for example, yellow palm fronds turned to 'frond yellow' (line 22); that is in protest to the non-recognition of the sufferings of Christ by many Christians by their behaviours. The same protestation goes in the violation of selection restriction rule in the statement 'this slow day dies' (line 1). The VP 'dies' should select for its subject an NP with the general semantic feature /+ animate/. But here it selects an NP 'day' with the feature /- animate/. He has also used a rhetorical question to show his disgust about the strangeness of behaviour; for example, 'Do we not truly fear to bleed?' This question is directed to Christians who fear to bleed if the spikes puncture their fingers while plucking pale fronds, in remembrance of Christ's passion. They should then consider Christ, into whose head the thorns were pushed. He uses that rhetorical question to bastardise the luke warmness of their followership. The only phonological indices the poet could accommodate are the chiming of the alveolar plosive /d/ in 'day dies' and /w/ in 'wordless wilt', both in line 1. These produce momentary musical sounds in the midst of intent discussion of the victim that died to save mankind. At the lexico-semantic level, the poet has couched the person of Christ and His sufferings in different words such as : 'soft frangipanes' (line 3) to represent the joy and goodies that Easter brings, 'hard mangoes' (line 7) to mean Christ's followers, 'bough' line 16 to represent Christ, 'winged ass' (line 21) to mean his car, 'spadix' (line 23) to mean thick fleshy spikes.

In conclusion, the three poems have been seen to be organically connected, the first leading to the second, while the third evaluates critically the sincerity of those who profess the Christian faith. Soyinka challenges Christians to appreciate the great sacrifice on the cross and match it with befitting good behaviour in furtherance of his own input while Herbert and Eliot emphasize the great importance and significance of Easter. From the study so far done, the paper holds that Ash Wednesday is a spiritual journey to Easter.

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