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**A Linguistic Comparison of Pauperism in African and Non-African  
Setting: A Study of Richard Nturu's 'The Pauper' and Crabbe's 'The  
Pauper's Funeral'.**

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**Abstract**

*This paper made a linguistic comparison of pauperism in both African and Non-African settings using two selected poems which are George Crabbe's 'The Pauper's Funeral' and Richard Nturu's 'The Pauper'. Nturu is a Ugandan poet who makes his readers have an idea of the concept of pauperism in the African setting while Crabbe, a 17<sup>th</sup> century English poet gives an account of pauperism in his cultural set up. Pauperism is and remains a regular phenomenon in societies, especially in a capitalist set up where there is wide gap in the social strata. This study is based on Chomskyan theory of transformational generative grammar which uses linguistic tools of graphology, phonology, syntax and lexico-semantics as its parameters for analysis. The purpose of this paper is to compare linguistically the attitudes of the two societies to the plight of this class of people. The finding is that both African and non – African societies are indifferent to their plight and consequently deplore them. Based on this finding, both the government and wealthy individuals in such societies should have a rethink and set up a machinery, to cater for their needs.*

*Key words: Pauperism, linguistic levels, machinery, phonology, African societies.*

## **Introduction**

Pauperism is the quality or state of being a pauper. A pauper is a person who is too poor to look after himself and so does not have a means of livelihood.

Readers' Digest Encyclopaedia, defines a pauper as ' a person without means of livelihood, beggar, recipient of poor-law relief.' Pauperism could result from debilitating illness of some members of the society, sheer laziness of an individual to carve out a means of livelihood or even innate habit to beg from others.

The poets whose poems are under study are from different cultural and geographical settings. Specifically Richard Nturu is a Ugandan indigene from a third world country in which such a category of people abound. According to the dictionary definition, such people are too poor to cater for themselves and are without a means of livelihood. They are beggars. In some better organized societies, the dictionary adds, they receive official help. George Crabbe is a 19<sup>th</sup> century English poet whose poem gives an account of the funeral of a pauper. It is worthwhile examining also the paupers of non- African society, so as to compare that with the African based pauper.

Although the pauper of Crabbe's poem is dead, his associates identify with him, but the unflinching indifference to his state becomes evident

eventually. 'The Pauper' of Richard Nturu's poem is typical of a regular scene in some streets of African countries. Many of such people line the streets of the cities with plates in disfigured limbs, exhibiting all signs of hopelessness of life; everything surrounding them is dismal. They are nobody's responsibility even the 'official' help is denied them. Even though Nturu's type of pauper is not yet dead, he is a living dead and when the inevitable happens, his carcass is found lying on the street; a casual job for the municipal council workers to dispose of, for the safety of human health.

The first type of pauper to be studied is the pauper in 'The Pauper's Funeral' by George Crabbe. Graphologically, the poem has two stanzas of abnormal lengths. The first stanza has eleven lines while the second has eighteen lines. The two stanzas are clustered with all manners of punctuation marks, such that each line bears one type, or the other. There are such punctuation marks as commas, which are just two, whereas semi-colons are very profusely used in the stanzas. Others are exclamation marks. These marks are so used in order to admit the highly informative nature of the poem. The poet has so much to say about the pauper and as such breaks the information in bits, controlled by the punctuation marks. Thematically, the first stanza displays ambivalent feelings about the pauper's death and his harsh relationship with the people that interrelate with him on daily basis,

where he usually positions himself. The second stanza accounts for the appreciation of him, by the innocent village children who used to interact with him during their playing periods. Finally, the unfailing negligence and apathy that surrounds the pauper's fate emerge here. The priest fails in his duty to bless and inter the pauper's body because he the priest is detained by some weightier care.

Phonologically, the poet spices the unpleasant life of the pauper with end rhymes in his poem. Such rhymes like 'explore/more', 'slow/below', 'free/fee' abound, until the end of the poem. This injects lighter mood in the face pitiable account of the pauper's life. Grammatically, the poet uses expressions in the first two lines of the poem to show that the pauper is a non-person thus:

/Now once again the gloomy scene explore less gloomy/  
/now, the bitter hour is o'er./

The poet makes reference to occasional deaths in the community by the phrase 'once again' and this time the gloom that is usually cast on the inhabitants when death occurs, is 'less'. Why does the poet regard it as a less gloomy 'scene'? That is because there is ambivalence of feeling; firstly the dead person is a pauper and his many sorrows and signs are no more. The inhabitants are sad because a life is lost and on the other hand, they are

happy because his sufferings have come to an end – /‘the bitter hour is o’ver’/. line 2. From the expressions that follow, the reader can grasp bits of information about how oppressive some people around the pauper have been, for example, because of his abject poverty he is referred to as the ‘happy dead’( line 6). The parish is glad to pay the frugal ‘fee’ because his location is the parish premises. His pauperism has earned him ‘church wardens steer or that of kingly oversee’ and the farmer’s claims of the pauper’s bow. ‘Death’, in comparison to these other oppressors is acclaimed ‘the best of tyrants because, the pauper has now been finally claimed by death.

In stanza 2, the opposite picture is painted of mourners who appreciate the pauper for one thing or the other who come sedately torpid and devoutly dumb’ (line 13). This group shows grief, occasioned by the loss of the pauper through death. This category includes village children who regard the pauper as their close associate and ‘ancient friend’, because the pauper is said to be ‘one in all their idle sport’ (line 16) and as such, they have suspended their games to pay him a last respect as they watch the bier that bears his body move up the winding way from the ‘vale below’ (line 5).

While the pauper appears to some as non person, the village children regard him as a ‘monarch that ruled their little court’. He is acknowledged as a

useful contributor towards their idle sport by producing ‘paint bow’ flying ball, the bat, the wicket’ (lines 18 and 19).

The village children regard him like a monarch who rules their little court and they follow him to his grave and stand ‘silent and sad’, ‘hand in hand, bending low gazing to explore the mingled relics of the parish poor.’ (lines 20-24). There is an interesting contrast between the adult’s oppressive attitude to the pauper and the village children’s solemn show of appreciation and sadness that his death has caused them. Why does the poet describe his remains as ‘mingled relics of the parish poor’? ( line 23). The dictionary defines relics as the preservation of a part of the body or clothing of holy persons or something that they owned, that is kept after their death and respected as a religious object. In other words, the pauper is physically a nobody but spiritually a holy person by the assessment of the innocent village children.

The height of achievement recorded by the village children’s reaction to the pauper’s funeral, drops with the adult’s insistent de-recognition of the pauper, from their activities for his funeral.

*/The bells toll late/*

*/...The busy priest detained by weightier care/*

*/Defers his duty till the day of prayer,/*

lines 24-27

The disappointing behaviour of de-recognition of the pauper by the priest is deferring a pressing urgent duty like burying the pauper till the day of prayer. This has caused his activity to become a failure. The result of this is the endless waiting by the crowd and their distress to retire, and 'to think that a poor man's bones should be unblessed?' (line 29.)

The unfortunate stigma that a pauper carries, remains with him even to his death. There is oxymoron of 'happy dead' in /there lie the 'happy dead'.

The biblical story of 'Lazarus and the King', highlights the position of the pauper in 'The Pauper's Funeral' by Crabbe. Surely, this pauper has prepared a place for himself in the next world. Another of such oxymoronic expressions is to call death 'the best of tyrants', as if tyranny is very complimentary.

At the Lexico-semantic level, all paraphernalia of pauperism are employed by the poet such as 'The bitter hour' ( line 2), 'unblessed many sorrows sigh' line 3, 'sadly slow', late toll of bill, 'parish poor' (line 23), 'deferring duty' (line 27), 'retire distressed', 'unblessed'. In the midst of all these deplorable and down grading words associated with the pauper, the village children upgrade him to the level of a 'monarch' in their little court.



There is the use of homophonic words in 'bow' 'of' (line 10) which the farmer claims from the pauper and 'bow' in 'plaint bow', in (line 18), which is one of the items the pauper produces for the village children's fun. One thing is credited to this pauper i.e. he has not bemoaned his condition rather he tries to be active and happy unlike the pauper in Nturu's poem.

Grammatically, some sentences are presented in thwarted order as opposed to the order of English sentence, in order to lay emphasis on the mournful situation thus: /Up Yonder hill behold how sadly slow the bier moves/  
/winding from the vale below/ (lines 4-5). Many compound sentences are produced with the use of the co-ordinator 'and' e.g. / There lie the happy dead, from trouble free/ and the glad parish pays the frugal fee/

The mourners include even an owl and it is said to be moping, and fear marks its flight. The owl is the least expected mourner during a funeral. It is a bird of prey but it is interested in announcing the death of the pauper. It aids the tolling bell to announce the death of the pauper. The kind of pauper in Crabbe's poem shows a good natured and active type.

The next poem to be examined is Richard Nturu's 'The Pauper'. The poet paints a picture of an African based pauper with life of hopelessness, abject poverty, and absolute dependence on non-dependable factors. The pauper has even lost the beauty of God-given physical endowment and

opportunities for good living. Nturu addresses the pauper as if his life is a curse to humanity. He curses the Creator for having produced such a worthless creature. The poet further wonders what treason that pauper has committed to warrant his condemnation to human indifference. This pauper of African location receives no organized assistance from the law or the government as expected from the dictionary definition. His situation is not presented seriously before law makers by members of parliament so as to receive attention. Paupers are therefore given no hope of betterment of their situation and they too yield to their unfortunate destiny. The pauper of Crabbe's poem enjoys a higher level of pauperism because he has a permanent location and people interact with him whether humiliatingly or appreciatively.

This poem reveals the pauper's life while Crabbe's follows the pauper's life to his funeral with no record of any time of happiness.

'The Pauper' by Richard Nturu is a poem of six stanzas with a total of 30 lines broken into five lines per stanza, unlike Crabbe's 'The Pauper's Funeral', which has two stanzas of 29 lines. The six-stanza of this poem are arranged structurally first, to question in stanza one, the value of creating such an abhorrence to humanity. The poet instead of blaming the Creator for forging such a creature, appears to forget the fact that pauperism

emanates from circumstances of life namely, poverty, debilitating health conditions, physical disability and or laziness to face the challenges of life. Some stanzas of the poem like stanzas 2, 3, 4, 5 shows the pauper's acceptance of the unchangeability of his circumstance, by engaging in activities of some kind. Stanza 6 blames the people at the corridors of power for their insensitivity towards the welfare of these unfortunate ones in the society. They, (the parliamentarians) rather enjoy seeing them at the road sides, as an attraction for tourists where they will take snapshots of them.

At the graphological level, punctuation marks like comas, question marks, exclamation marks, full stops are aptly used and they enhance a free flow in the reading of the poem. Some lines especially the last lines of stanzas 2, 3, 5, and 6 are unusually longer than the other lines and that length enables the *persona* to put forward his grievance about the nauseating presence of this category of human beings in the society. Some words are given prominence by capitalizing them for example 'He in lines 14, 21, 25, to identify the forger of that 'piteous fate', then 'MP' which is member of parliament is derisively given prominence even as such members treat with levity the serious nature of the people they claim to represent in the government. 'Question Time' is also capitalized to show that, that

period is not when serious matters are presented. The exaggerated capitalization becomes a pointer of failure and a minus mark for those in the parliament, who ought to see to the plight of the paupers

At the phonological level, there are no end rhymes but some words like 'pauper' are repeated up to four times in stanzas 1&6, calling the pauper's attention to his unfair state. This is for stylistic emphasis.

Pauper, Pauper, craning your eyes line 1

Pauper, pauper, crouching in beautiful verandah line 2 6

There is also a repetition of 'beautiful' four times. This creates contrast between the pauper and his environment / crouching in beautiful verandah of beautiful cities and beautiful people/ line 26&27.

At the syntactic level, the *persona* uses direct statement to describe the pauper's feature and to address his awkward and lazy life style. The personal pronouns 'I' for the speaker, and 'You' the addressee, 'He' the third person singular, and 'your', are used. These produce first hand information and accurate description, such as 'craning your eyes in all directions, in no direction.' There is contradiction in the statement 'all directions and no direction'. That is to underscore his hopeless situation. He cranes with his neck, seeking for help and apparently getting none. The

*persona* buttresses his (the *persona's*) disgust by the rhetorical questions that follow:

/What brutal force, malignant element/

/dare to forge your piteous fate?/

/Was it worth the effort, the time?/ lines 3-5

/What crime, what treason did you commit/

/That you are thus condemned to human indifference / line 9-10

Other rhetoric questions used for emphasis are:

/Does He admire your sense of endurance?/

/Or turn his head away from your impediment presence?/

/Does He pat his paunch at the wonderful sight?/ line 25

The poet employs simile to bring out the clear picture of the pauper's situation especially the bleak future that glares at the pauper:

You simply lean on a leafless tree

...like a baby newly born to an old women

The imagery of a leafless tree states that the tree on which the pauper leans is as unproductive as the pauper himself and can hardly give him succour just like the next imagery of 'a baby newly born to an old woman'. An old woman whose breast is flabby can never suckle a newly born baby who depends on his mother's milk to survive. The difference between the two

categories of paupers is firstly their chosen abode. The non-African pauper posits himself in a church or parish premises where, although he suffers the sternness of the Churchwarden and forced bow from the farmer, he becomes the responsibility of the parish such that the 'frugal fee' is paid at his death. The African based pauper chooses the road side, market places and sometimes church premises where he begs with his plate beside him. He is nobody's responsibility. Secondly the non-African pauper's indomitable spirit to exist cannot be compared to the African based pauper's resignation to his fate and his indolent tendency. The non-African pauper occupies himself with forming 'pliant bow, flying ball, the bat, the wicket' (lines 18 and 19), and acts like a monarch ruling their 'little court' (line 17). That is why the village children suspend their games for the funeral of the pauper. The African pauper spends his time 'nursing the jiggers that shrivel your bottom'; sits alone on hairless goat skin, squashing lice between your nails' 'and cleaning your nails with dry saliva' (lines 19 and 20). Because of his unhealthy surrounding, the African pauper's physical state is given a very strong pictorial description thus

*/...you trudge on the horny pads,/*

*/Gullied like soles of modern shoes/*

*/Pads that even jiggers cannot conquer/ (lines 11-13)*

One can imagine that the pauper instead of walking on his feet, trudges on the horny pads. Because the harsh weather condition where he stays has turned his human body to be likened to that of animals, his skin is described as:

/... grimy coating/

/Caking off your emaciated skin/

/... the rust that uproots all your teeth /

/Like a pick on a stony piece of land / (lines 21-24)

The reader does not need to stress his brain to imagine the state of his (the pauper's) skin and denture, The persona is filled with disgust about the pauper's Maker's indifference to his condition:

/Does He admire your sense of endurance?/

/Or turn his head away from your impudent presence?/ line 15

/Does he spat his paunch at the wonderful sight?/ line 25

The last rhetoric question is sarcastic because the pauper's condition is far from being a wonderful sight. The insensitivity of the people in the society is shown where tourist especially strangers and perhaps non-Africans on tourist's trip take snapshots of the paupers. The *persona*, who trivialises the pauper's condition even joins the tourist to take snapshots of the pauper. On the other hand, the member of parliament is contrastively

described as having 'shining head' and 'triple chin' which could be contrasted with the pauper's emaciated skin, ribs and bones which 'reflect the light from 'the beautiful cars' line 8.

To worsen the situation of the pauper, his welfare is brought up at the parliament by the MP in a supplementary question at Question Time. (line 35).

At the level of lexico- semantics, words are carefully employed to aptly describe the condition of the African based pauper. His creation is described as 'forging with brutal force' His condition is described as 'piteous fate'; his feet are described as 'horny pads, which 'jiggers cannot conquer'. (line 13 ) His idleness is described with nauseating words like 'squashing lice' 'condemned to human indifference' line 10

He is said to 'crouch instead of sitting in beautiful verandahs, 'triple chin' used to describe the comfortable, well-fed member of parliament, (MP) who does nothing positive to redeem the deplorable state of the down trodden in the society.

In conclusion ,pauperism is a common phenomenon both in African and non African settings. Their plights are similar, in that they are no one's responsibility but the paupers of the Western world resist the tendency to go out to the streets for outright begging , while those of the African setting as a



matter of habit take to the streets to beg. In both settings their governments have not been able to take positive steps to support the paupers and that is the message these two poets have dropped in their poems. This writer recommends that the affairs of the down trodden in every society should be everybody's business. Such governments should borrow a leaf from well-organised governments, as to how such categories of people are catered for. The philanthropists in partnership with the government, should give vocational training to talented but indigent members of the society, to enable them to prove their mettle just as the pauper in Crabbe's poem has done. The very indigent ones who are physically incapacitated should benefit from funds set aside to alleviate poverty. Such people should be sighted and their names forwarded by the village heads, to the designated centres for appropriate action. Free education should be extended to all levels of education so that everybody will enjoy equal opportunities.

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