Mood, Interpersonaland Ideological Meaning Patterns in the 'Abiku' Poems (J. P. Clark, W. Soyinka)

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Abstract

This paper analyses the mood and modality patterns in two poems with the same title by two Nigerian writers, John Pepper Clark (1965) and Wole Soyinka (1965). The analysis reveals that, despite their monologic organization, the two poems appear as a dialogue between a parent-poet (Clark) and a rebellious child-poet (Soyinka). In particular, the mood and modality choices show some kind of power and hierarchy conflict between the parent and the child who considers himself as older than his parents. This leads to some idea of a-temporality regarding the Abiku-child, which is confirmed by the analysis of tense-selection in the poems.

Keywords: mood, modality; modulation, modalisation, tenor of discourse, a-temporality

Résumé

Cet article analyse les tournures de mode et modalité dans deux poèmes de même titre 'Abiku' écrits par deux nigérians, John Pepper Clark (1965) et Wole Soyinka (1965). L'analyse montre que, malgré leur apparence monologique, les deux poèmes se présentent un dialogue houleux entre un parent-poète (Clark) et un enfant-poète rebelle (Soyinka). En particulier, les choix de mode et de modalité opérés par chaque narrateur révèlent quelque conflit de pouvoir et d'hiérarchie entre le parent et l'enfant qui se considère comme étant plus vieux. Cela renvoie à la notion d'atemporalité par rapport à l'enfant Abiku, une idée confirmée par l'analyse de la sélection des temps dans les deux poèmes.

Mots clés: mode, modalité, modulation, modalisation, ton de discours, atemporalité

1. Introduction

In his Foreword to Cummings and Simmons (1984), Halliday makes to points that can serve as checklist for linguistics-oriented analysis of literary texts. The first is the researcher/analyst being able to say: "….*I know why this text makes an impact on me … but also I can make this understanding clear to you and to anyone who is prepared to follow and check out my reasoning…. I can demonstrate **why** this text means all that I say it means*" (p. ix). This entails that the major enterprise of the analyst is to show how a texts means what it does. Secondly, he says: "*[After the analysis,] what seemed flat becomes rounded; what rounded still has other dimensions added to it*" (p. vii). This clearly points to the significant role of interpretation in understanding the (second-level) meaning of the different (first-level) meanings revealed and proved by the analysis.This leads to the contention that the analysis of the lexico-grammatical patterns can reveal meaning in more fascinating and objective a way than could be expected from the traditional methods of appreciating the language of literature. For that purpose, the grammatical analysis of two joint-title poems by two Nigerian poets has been carried out through mood and modality choices with a view to uncovering their differences, to specify the nature of those differences and relate them to the ideological positions of the two poets to the same issue. Before the analysis proper and the interpretation it leads to, it has been deemed necessary to overview the theoretical background to the study.

2. Theoretical Background: Mood, Interpersonal Meaning, and Ideological Context

2. 1. Mood, Modality andInterpersonal Meaning

The word "mood", written in small-case letters, generally refers to each of the different forms of the verb: declarative, interrogative, imperative, subjunctive, exclamative, etc that are used to affirm more or less the thing in question, and to express the different points of view from which the thing is looked at (Genette, 1980; Halliday, 1985; Eggins, 1994). In other words, it is the linguistic expression of attitudes, judgements, points of view, social relationship…etc, and its study involves the identification and analysis of mood types, modality and adjunct types in a given piece of discourse. Each mood type has a general speech function, as summed up in the table below:

Mood types	Speech functions
-declarative mood	-giving information by stating what is or happens
-interrogative mood	-request of information
-modulated interrogative mood	-indirect/tempered request of information
- imperative mood	-getting somebody to do something
-modulated imperative mood	-getting indirectly/in a tempered way somebody to do something by using, say, polite modals.
- exclamative mood	-expressing wonder, surprise, bewilderment

Table 1: Mood types and their Speech Functions: Culled from Halliday, 1985a; Eggins, 1994; Aitchison, 2007

Yet, each mood type can be used unordinarily to express a different speech function from its usual one. For instance "*I'm a visitor, and I don't know the way to the ambassador's house*" functions as a question, and "*Can you turn down the volume?*" does so as a command or request, not as a yes/no question. As for the term "modality", it is used to refer to that component of the interpersonal meaning which functions to indicate aspects of the writer's/speaker's/narrator's attitude to the subject matter, or his/her comment on the trueness, relevance and reliability of the proposition made. Basically, it is the expression of attitudes, judgements and perspectives. Halliday (1985a) put it this way: "*Modality is the area of meaning that lies between yes and no –the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity*" (p.335). As for Fowler (1986), it is "*the grammar of explicit comments, a means by which people express their degree of commitment to the propositions they utter, and their views on the desirability or otherwise of the states of affairs referred to*" (p.132). In fact, modality makes explicit announcements about beliefs, which is why the same Fowler argues that "*it has been traditionally assumed in stylistics that the different ways people express their thoughts consciously or unconsciously indicate their personalities and attitudes*''(p.132.) From these definitions, one can easily gather that the grammar of modality in question has two basic components: *modalisation* and *modulation*. While the former is an expression of the speaker's/writer's judgement about uncertainty, probability, likelihood, frequency, etc, and operates through finite modal operators like "can, could, may, might" or mood adjuncts like "I'm sure, I think, it's likely, it's possible, it's probable…etc" (Eggins, 1994), the latter expresses obligation, inclination or disinclination through finite modal operators like "must, should, need, ought to, have to, shall, shan't, will, won't, cannot, etc" or any other means. Appropriately thus, Brown (1980), in McCornell-Ginet et al. (1980:122) refers to the first group of modalisers as '*weakeners'* and to the second of modulators as '*strengtheners'.* Modality can also be achieved through the use of verbs of knowledge, prediction, and evaluation: seem, believe, guess, foresee, approve… etc; evaluative adjectives/adverbs/expressions: luckily, fortunately, to no avail…etc.

The phrase "*tenor of discourse*" is used to designate the role relation of power and solidarity between the interactants; speaker/listener, addresser/addressee, writer or narrator/reader or the writer/speaker's attitude to the subject matter…etc. It has impact on language use because one does not use language in the same way to talk or write, say, to one's lecturer or boss as to talk or write to one's wife or lover, or to talk or write about what one likes as to do so and so about what one dislikes. For Halliday (1978): "tenor refers to the interactions between participants in terms of status and role relationships" (p.62). Drawing on Halliday (1978, 1985), Eggins (1994) argues that tenor can be broken down into the three continua of 'power', 'affective involvement' and 'contact'. The main contention is that close analysis of how people speak to each other will help to see whether they are of equal or unequal power, have frequent or infrequent contact and the level of their emotional involvement in the situation they find themselves in.

2.2. Context of Situation, Culture and Ideology

The term *'context'* is used in systemic functional linguistics to designate the relationship of certain language to certain kind of situation, culture or ideology. This packed attempt of definition shows that there are three levels of context: context of situation, context of culture and the context of ideology.The context of situation, also called register, has to do with the impact of situation (occupational, social and linguistic) on the way language is used. As can be guessed, it has three dimensions, referred to as register variables –**field, tenor,** and **mode –** which have impact on the way language is used. As only the second of these three variables is concerned with, it has been briefly discussed earlier. Malinowski (1946), cited in Eggins, 1994), has quite early expressed the need for the researcher to understand the cultural context in which language is being used: ''The study of any language, spoken by people who live under conditions different from our own and possess a different culture, must be carried out in conjunction with the study of their culture and their environment.'' (p. 50).The importance of this cultural contextualisation is later highlighted by Halliday and Hassan (1985) this way:In any adequate description, it was necessary to provide information not only about what was happening at the time but also the total cultural background, because involved in any kind of linguistic interaction, in any kind of conversational exchange, were not only the immediate sights and sounds surrounding the event but also the whole cultural history behind the participants, and behind the kind of practices that they were engaged in, determining their significance for the culture whether practical or ritual. All these played a part in the interpretation of the meaning (p.6).

For Fowler (1986), the context of situation needs to be related to that of culture since both influences the structure of the discourse. The context of culture is the whole network of social and economic conventions and institutions constituting the culture at large, especially in so far as these bear on particular utterance context and influence the structure of the discourse occurring within them. All discourse, including literature, has a definite context of culture which may be studied as an influence on the linguistic structures of literary texts and as guide to its interpretation. The most abstract level of context, precisely of context of culture, is the context of ideology, a set of beliefs, values, perspectives and categories by reference to which a person comprehends the world. It is sometimes even more important because whatever the situation and/or culture we are engaged in, our use of language is always influenced by our ideological perspective, the particular angle of vision we adopt faced with a particular issue. In other words, ideology is a personal thing whereas culture is collective and includes ideology. The theoretical concepts having now been overviewed, the next section focuses on the mood analysis of the two poems with a view to showing how the mood choices reveal, beyond the situational and cultural contexts, the ideological position of each poet regarding the Abiku concept.

3. *Practical Mood Analysis of the Poems*

For the purpose of this analysis, each of the two poems is divided in its constituent clauses (finite and non-finite). These are listed in $table_{1a}$ for $text_1$, and in $table_{1b}$ for $text_2$ (see appendix 1.) Capitals number the stanzas, capitals indexed by Arabic numerals number the lines and simple Arabic numerals number the clauses. Some line entries show two or more line labels separated by slashes; this simply means that the clause concerned begins on the first line and continues to the last one. It will also be noticed that some clauses have a subscript; for example, clause [8a] of line [A_{11}], $text_1$, and clauses [19 ^{a} $_2$] lines [E_{20}-$G_{25/26}$], $text_2$. These are rankshifted clauses, a rankshifted clause being a complete clause carrying out the function of nominal group or of just a word acting either as a complementiser, or a qualifier/modifier/ within the nominal group or as a predicate nominative. This mood analysis has taken into account the major mood types, the use of modality and tense selection in both texts.

3.1. Analysis of Mood Types in the two Poems.

The major mood types: declarative, imperative and interrogative have been identified and counted. The statistics is presented in $table_2$

Mood types	Text₁		Text₂	
	Clause **n°s**	quantity	Clause **n°s**	quantity
Declarative	4, 5, 6, 7, 8a, 9, 10, 11, 15, 19, 20, 21.	**12 (60%)**	1,2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11,12,13, 16, 17, 19, 19a₁, 19a₂, 19a₃, 19a₄, 19a₅, 19a₆, 20, 21, 22, 23,24, 25, 25a₁	**25 (80.65%)**
Imperative	2, 3, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18.	**08 (40%)**	8, 9, 14, 15.	**04 (12.90%)**
Interrogative		0	4, 5	**02 (06.45%)**
Exclamative		0	0	0

Table 2: Distribution of Mood Types in the Texts

It can be seen from the table that declarative mood is dominant in both texts; 12 **(60%)** in text₁and 25 **(80.65%)** in text**₂**. This mood being the mood par excellence for the giving of information (Eggins, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), it can be said that both texts share a common feature of giving information. However, the amount of information packed in text₂ is more important that in text₁. This not only justifies Abiku claims of knowledge as he sees himself as 'ageless,' 'a palmist', and 'an elder' It also justifies the attribute of monologue-type organization of the poems taken individually. The imperative mood ranks second in both texts [**08 (40%)**] in text₁ and [**04 (12.90%)**] in text₂. This gives the impression of a direct face–to–face interaction between the speaker/addresser and the listener/addressee, with the former demanding an action form the latter or suggests that the texts are doing more than giving information but that the information must be considered as an order or a command. The higher rate of imperative in text₁ gives it, on the surface level, a more authoritarian tenor than text ₂. On the other hand, there is no interrogative in text₁ while there are **02** [06.45%] in text₂, which gives the impression of a face-face interaction with the speaker demanding a verbal response from the listeners. In addition, these two interrogatives are highly modulated with the strengthener '*must*', this reinforces the relative power of the **04** imperatives and gives text₂ at least the same authoritarian tenor as text₁. There is no exclamative mood in either text, which means there is little emotional content and affective involvement in them. It must be reminded that exclamative mood is the one par excellence to express the emotional status of the speaker or writer in terms of bewilderment, surprise, disgust, concern, anxiety, happiness etc. (Halliday, 1985a; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Eggins, 1994; Fowler, 1986; Amoussou, 2014). In particular, the use of the modal verbal operator '*we know*' by the poet-narrator in text₁ and that of the strongly modulated cognitive mental process '*you must know*' by Abiku in text₂ really proves that the two poems are like a face-to-face dialogue. In particular, this strengthener, which adds to the tenor of the speaker in text₂, still reinforces its authority over the other one.

It can therefore be claimed that the first poem, that is, text₁, is a firm, an authoritarian call from the poet-narrator on behalf of the parents (mothers) to Abiku to come and stay in the living world and that the second poem, text₂, is Abiku's more authoritarian and ironic response, rejecting the call and mocking the rites that accompany it. All this gives the impression that the two poems form, despite their individual monologic organization, an imaginary dialogue, even a lively argument between a parent-poet and Abiku. In that dialogue one lets the other fellow finish his talk, his point completely before reacting. And one speaks to the other with a hostile tone, with no regard to age hierarchy, with no solidarity for the other. All this leads to the suspicion that the poems express some power and hierarchy conflict between the parent-poet, who minimises Abiku as a mere evil child, and Abiku, who asserts his personality by defining himself as an elder, a god, a palmist, a trickster. From this analysis, the dialogic structure of the two poems can be schematically represented as follows:

Text₁		Text₂	
sections	stages	sections	stages
[1 – 4]	Insistent request stage	[1 – 8]	Challenge, defiance and self-assertion stage.
[5 -14]	Argument stage1	[8 – 12]	Request and command Stage
[15 -17]	persuasive request stage	[12 – 16]	Self-assertion and instruction stage
[17 – 22]	argument stage3	[17 – 32]	Abiku's manifestations: tricks.
[23- 24]	persuasive request stage		
[24 – 26]	argument stage3		

Table 3: **Dialogic Structure of the 'Abiku' Poems**

The next section discusses the use of modality in conjunction with that of imperative mood to show how they reinforce each other, and the effect of rewriting on the mood power of some imperative-mood clauses.

3.2. Modality and Imperative Mood in the Poems

3.2. 1.Analysis of Modality in the Poems

The table below recapitulates the instances of modality in the poems.

Text₁			Text₂		
Clause n°	Modality items	Nature	Clause n°	Modality items	nature
(5)	**True**,	evaluative adjunct	(1)	**In vain**:	evaluative adjunct
(9)	**Still**,	evaluative adjunct	(4) (6)	**must**: **must**:	modulator modulator
(16)	**We know**	modal verbal operator: high modaliser	(16)	**Once and repeated time**:	high modaliser
			(20)	**will**:	modulator
			(21)	**will**:	modulator

Table 4: Modality-Markers in the Poems

It must be noticed that modality operates in text₁ through high modalisation in (5) and (9) by means of comment/evaluative adjuncts. It is also at work in **(16)** through a modal verbal operator. This means that the information about the poor conditions of the house is 'true', and despite this, it is 'still' good for other children and, thus, should be so for Abiku, since he is recognized (we know …) as what he already is. In text₂, the negative comment or evaluative adjunct 'in vain,' is bluntly used by Abiku in **(1)** defy the effects of the rites performed on his body by the parents to keep him among the living. High modalisation through the frequency adjunct 'Once and the repeated time' is resorted to in **(16)** to express the usuality or everlastingness of Abiku's manifestations and the vocative adjunct 'Mother!' is made use of in **(20)**.This use of vocative adjunct gives the impression, the evidence of the context of the poem being addressed to some presumed present listeners –'**Mothers'** from whom the speaker –Abiku is trying to get maximum attention as to the importance of the information being given. The modulator 'will' also appears twice in this text: **(10)** and **(11)**. Indeed, in addition to its function as a future-tense modal, this also functions to express "the speaker's determination or consent," in contrast to 'shall' which serves "to express the speaker's belief or strong state of mind" (Strunk and White, 1997; 833). High modulation is at stake in **(4)**, **(5)** and **(10)** through the triple use of '**must'** to ironically show the forcefulness of the claim being made by Abiku and the deduction arrived at. The high modulation of the interrogatives **(4, 5)** leads to the tour de force of Abiku's authoritarian tone as they have double force: first, their usual power, that of demanding a verbal response of the addressee; second, the use of '**must'** helps it to express some obligation and forcefulness of the demand. In fact, high modulation, or absence of it, is expressive either of superior status, or of lack of deference to hierarchical status. As such, it can be said that the tone of the poem, text₂, is set mainly set by high modalisation, which is close in power to modulation, and modulation properly speaking. It is a rather ironically authoritarian tone, that of defiance and mockery intended for the hierarchical position of the parents, which may be characterized, and is always characterized, as ''speaking impolitely'' in Eggins' terms (1994: 194).What is more, the use of generic or proverbial sentences by Abiku, which somehow take the tune of incantatory speech, is another indicator of confidence, as in: **(6)** "Yams do not sprout in amulets"; (19ₐ₃) "white dew suckles flesh-birds," and (19ₐ₄) "Evening befriends the spider"... Interestingly, Fowler (1986) contends that the use of these sentences will make the reader bound to suspect the objectivity of someone who is so self-conscious, so confident and considered in their judgements (p. 137).

3.2.2 Contribution of Imperative Mood to Modality

While the visible modality-carrying function of the imperative is expressed through highly modulated or emphatic imperative '**Do'** in (2) and through a persuasive imperative with 'No longer then' in (12) in text₁,the imperatives (9) and (15) in text₂ are rather given emphasis by intensifiers like ''**deeply**'' and ''**deeper still**.'' This gives and confirms the authoritarian tone of Abiku towards the mothers, the whole family and society at large, with Abiku ironically giving them instructions as to what to do to fix him in the world in his position of palmist and elder. In addition to the visible uses of modulation, it can be argued that most of the imperatives identified in both texts carry some strong modulation after their rephrasing. Indeed, the way the passive transformation of the imperative sentence is taught in traditional grammar books/classes provides a good foundation for this argument.

For example, these sentences **(a)** 'Open the door,' and **(b)** 'Don't open the door' will go through the following rephrasing (a_0, b_0) before the passive transformations (a_1, b_1) can be obtained:

labels	rephrasing	transformations
a.	a_0. (You <u>must/should/ought to</u>) open the door.	a_1)The door <u>must/should/ought to</u> be opened (by you) a_2) **Let** the door be opened (by you). a_3) **May** the door be opened (by you).
b.	b_0. (You <u>must not /should not /ought not to</u>) open the door.	b_1)The door <u>must not/should not/ ought not to</u> be opened (by you) b_2) **Let** the door **not**be opened (by you). b_3) **May** the door **not** be opened (by you).

Table 5: Imperative-Mood Transformability

As it appears, the rewritten versions bring to light the hidden modulators in the surface- level sentences which clearly reappear in the passive transformations (a_1, b_1.) Even the other passive versions express modulation through 'let, may, let...not, may...not). It must be pointed out here that the imperative/instructional/invocative '**may'**, which is **'a modulator,'** is different from the probability or uncertainty-expressive '**may**,' which is '**a modaliser**.' Based on that, the different imperatives in the two poems can be rewritten to bring to light the hidden modulators; this is reported in **table 6** below.

Text 1		Text 2	
Clause n°	Rewritten versions	Clause n°	Rewritten versions
(2)	(You **must/should**) stay out on the baobab tree.	(8)	(You **must/should**) Whet the heated fragment,
(3)	(You **can/may**) follow [3a] your kindred spirits[3a]= **where you please**	(9)	(You **must/should**) brand me deeply on the breast.
(10)	(You **must/should**) no longer then bestride the threshold	(14)	(You **must/should**) Remember this, And
(11)	But (You **must/should**) step in	(15)	(You **must/should**) dig me deeper still into the god's swollen foot
(12)	And (you **must/should**) stay for good.		
(16)	Then (you **must/should**) step in		
(17)	(you **must/should**) step in		
(18)	And (you **must/should**) stay		

Table 6: Rewritten Imperatives in the Poems

It must be noticed that the phrase 'where you please,' which is somehow used as parenthetical to (3) in $text_1$ has some softening/modalising effect on the imperative, turning into a modaliser, which is why it is rewritten with '**can/may**.' This use of modalised imperative confirms the pleading tone suspected in the tenor of the poet earlier. This has the effect that Abiku is given an alternative, either he chooses to stay with his kindred spirits, the poet's euphemism for 'evil spirits' or to come and remain among the living. Once the second option is opted for, it becomes a must for Abiku to stay in order to avoid causing much more heartbreak. In addition, this reduces the quantity and rate of truly imperative clauses from 8/20 **(40%)** to 7/20 **(35%)**, which entails a reduction in the tenor of discourse.

3.3. Tense Selection in the Poems

The finite clauses have been taken into account for the tense statistics presented in the table below.

Tense	$Text_1$		$Text_2$	
	Clause n°s	quantity	Clause n°s	quantity
Past		**0**	13, 19a1, 22, 23, 24.	**05(17. 86**%)
Present	2, 3a, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 8a, 9, 11, 15, 15a, 19, 20, 21.	**15 (93.75**%)	1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 19a2, 19a3, 19a4, 19a5, 19a6, 25.	**18 (64.28**%)
Future	10	**01 (06.25**%)	4, 5, 10, 20, 21.	**05(17. 86**%)

Table 7: Tense Distribution in the Poems

As can be seen from the table, $text_1$ mainly selects the present tense **(93.75**%), the only future tense **(06.25**%) being used with reference to the house. This tense distribution is very revealing to the meaning of the poems.

Abiku is pleaded through the imperatives (12, 13, 14, 2, 3,) to come and stay in 'the living world' (=the present); but he is defended from dying (=returning into the past) and being born again (=coming back in future). The invitation to stay in the living world being the concern of the poem, it is not surprising that it should select predominantly the present tense. Text$_2$, however, selects the three tenses: past (**64.28**%), present (**17. 86**%), and future (**17. 86**%). This distribution supports to a great extent Abiku's claims for being an a multi-dimensional character: a child, an elder, a palmist, a god, and a trickster, as can be inferred from these words and phrases: 'first and repeated time' (3), 'once an repeated time' (16), 'goats and cowries' (4), 'palm oil and sprinkled ash' (5), 'cracked the riddle of the palm' (13), 'ageless' (16), 'puke' (17), 'suppliant snake' (20). All this gives an impression of a-temporality regarding Abiku. Indeed, the dominance of the present tense (**64.28**%) shows that it forms the background while the past and the future, equal in proportion –[**17. 86**%.] and [**17. 86**%]– are in clash with the background. They are fore grounded to the effect that Abiku can be seen mainly as a being of the past and future, which repeatedly and briefly each time appears among the living. To understand the a-temporal character of Abiku requires digging into the context of culture.

4. Recapitulation and Interpretation of the Findings

The mood and modality analysis reveals that the two poems taken together are about a power and hierarchy conflict between Abiku and the parents. Indeed, Clark's poem, judging from the dominance of imperative mood, appears as a persuasive-abusive plea from the parent-poet to the child Abiku in an authoritarian tone with no solidarity for the child. As for Soyinka's one, drawing on the significant occurrence of the imperative and interrogative moods and of strong modulators, it looks like a retaliation, an ironic rejection of that plea, perhaps judging by its tone. Tense selection has given an idea of a-temporality about Abiku's being, as he sees himself as a god, an elder, a palmist, a child, and an unborn. To help to comprehend these clashing presentations of the Abiku-child, i.e., Clark's view of him as a mere evil child and Soyinka's representation of him as a multifaceted character, the theme/concept of 'Abiku' requires a bit of explanation placed in its context of culture before its impact can be fully appreciated.

In West African countries, there is a firm belief that some children are sent into this world from the underworld by some malevolent spirit godmothers so that they collect items of clothing for their (god mother's) use (Krampah, 1979; Okpewho, 1985; Soyinka, 1990). Such children die soon after birth or else stay for a few days, months or years only. When they die, they are buried, naturally with some clothes and other items of wear, which they take to the underworld. Expectedly, they leave a lot of heartache behind. When a couple are thus bereaved once or twice in succession, they become convinced that the cause of their sadness is the errand child of a spirit god-mother and steps are taken to break the evil cycle of birth-death–rebirth. These include a visit to either a shrine or to a medicine man's, either as soon as the child who has died is buried or signs of another pregnancy become evident. Lotions are prepared for the mother, sacrifices and rituals of different sorts are gone through; often the home itself has to be purified or else a spiritual trap is set there to entangle the next body when it arrives and prevent it from dying. When the child is born, further rituals are performed and marks are cut on its face (and back and other areas); bangles, rods and wands or amulets are put to its feet or arms. The bangles and the similar objects are supposed to protect the baby from the evil god-mother, and the marks are to make it so ugly that its spirit god-mother may not want to have it back in the spirit world. They also help to mark out the baby so that if it dies and returns again, it might easily be recognised for what it really is. Very often when such children are born again/return, faint traces of the marks are evident on their bodies; and all sorts of insults are heaped on the reincarnated child so marked out from other children of its age.

Thus placed into its context of culture, Clark's poem can easily be said to present Abiku from the collective, societal perspective and since Abiku does nobody any good, it can be associated with the evil spirits; its ''kindred spirits'' and can be abused as 'a bondsman'. What is Abiku's reaction to this? In fact the a-temporality noticed in Soyinka's poem gives the impression that he is using the Abiku-myth to treat indirectly a rather philosophical issue: the relation between the dead (past), the living (present) and the unborn (future). Here again the context of culture, namely, the temporal conception of the traditional west African worldview, by and large, and of the Yoruba's one in particular, needs to be drawn on to understand the power show, the authoritarian tone displayed by Abiku towards its parents and the society in general.

Actually, traditional thought operates, not in a linear conception of time but a cyclic reality ''*all goes onwards and outwards*'', goes the saying. The degree of integrated acceptance of this temporal sense in life rhythm is a reflection of the reality that denies periodicity to the existences of the dead, the living and the unborn.

The traditional expression ''*the child is the father of the man*'' becomes within the context of this time structure, not merely a metaphor of development, one that is rooted in a system of representative individuation, but a proverb of human continuity which is not unidirectional. Soyinka (1990) alludes to this non-directionality when he wrote:

Neither ''child'' nor ''father' is a closed or chronological concept. The world of the unborn, in the Yoruba world – view, is as evidently older than the world of the living as the world of the living is older than the ancestor-world. And, of course the other way round: we can even insist that the world of the unborn is older than the world of the ancestor in the same breath as declare that the deities preceded humanity into existence. (p. 10)

To illustrate this, let us take a common enough example. An elderly person would refer to a child as '*Baba*' (Father or elder) if the circumstance of his birth made his coming into the living world retrospective. Its conduct toward the child would be so deferential that he might never call him by his real name, such as the case of the late Beninese reggae star Baba Jallah, who was never called by his real name, which is why that name was hardly known. If he held a family feast, the elder's place of honour would go to the child guest. This is a balancing principle, one that prevents total inflexibility in the age hierarchies that normally govern traditional society in Africa. So the unborn are wills that can express themselves through an insensitive stubbornness. The poem explores that belief, which is why Soyinka makes Abiku speak in the first person, making him express his defiance, his challenge to the rites performed to fix him in this world; ''*to earth Abiku's limbs*''. Here Abiku seems to be expressing, voicing his will-power and the power of his personality as a palmist, a god, a trickster, and an unborn. Abiku is a being astride in many ways. He appears briefly among the living, but has his place in the world of the unborn which seems to be confounded with that of the ancestors. The new-born baby, therefore, is not, in Galle's terms (1987), ''*a tabula rasa*'' (p. 134). It is rich in pre-birth experiences for the best and for the worst. The stubbornness of the indomitable spirit Abiku as well as his mocking and cheeky indifference seem to show that before being born, he was a complete person, full of knowledge, a will in the world of ''*cosmic volunty*'' in Soyinka's terms (1990, p.13). And Soyinka alluded to that pre-birth knowledge in his poem ''*A First Death Day*'', dedicated to his junior sister who died on her very first birthday. He wrote, as glossed by Galle (1787): ''*Un Tel savoir, quand la croissance diffuse, se dissipe jusqu'à ce qu'en linceuls les langages se déchirent*'' (p. 10). For Soyinka, it seems, the little girl has preferred to go back into her former world before her knowledge could diffuse. Above all, the Abiku child seems to reflect Soyinka's personality as an artist and activist engaged in a steady struggle to correct society.

5. Conclusion

What has been shown in this paper is that the contexts of situation and of culture have not been enough to explain the differences neither between Soyinka and Clark's treatments of Abiku, nor between their tenors of discourse. Actually, the two poems have nearly the same contexts of situation (a parent speaking to Abiku, and Abiku speaking to a parent) and of culture (a Nigerian/Yoruba issue discussed in the English language). Besides the two poets have many similar points. Both were born in 1934, both studied at Ibadan University, both were founding editors of the *Horn* (a Student Poetry Magazine), both were prominent members of the Mbari Cultural Club and contributors to *Black Orpheus* (the Club's literary journal), and each ran a theatre enterprise in Lagos. But they have different ideological positions to Abiku. For Clark, Abiku is a mere evil child and thus can be talked to in an authoritarian tone and abused without apology while Soyinka seems to consider Abiku, not just as a mere child, but mainly as an ancestor, an elder, a palmist full of knowledge and therefore worthy of respect. In short, Clark seems to give just a societal treatment, or interpretation to the concept of Abiku while Soyinka seems to provide a rather meta-societal, a kind of mystical or even philosophical treatment or interpretation to the concept. Abiku's authoritarian tone is thus the assertion of his will power and correction of the parents' view of him.

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Appendices

A-The poems taken to Pieces

Text₁ (table₁ a)

Stanza	Lines	Clause n°ˢ	Clause
A	A1	1	Coming and going these several seasons,
	A2	2	Do stay out on the baobab tree
	A3	3	Follow [3a] your kindred spirits
	A3/4	3a	[Where you please]
	A4	4	If indoors it is not enough for you.
	A5	5	True, it leaks through the thatch
	A6	6	When floods brim the banks
	A7/8	7	And the bats and the owls often tear in at night through the eaves,
	A9/10	8	And at harmattan the bamboo walls are ready tinder for the fire [8a]
	A11	8a	[That dries the fresh fish up to the rack]
	A12/13	9	Still, it's been the healthy stock to several fingers,
	A13	10	To many more will be
	A14	11	Who reach to the sun.
	A15	12	No longer then bestride the threshold
	A16	13	But step in
	A16/17	14	And stay for good.
	A17	15	We know [15a]
	A17/22	15a	[The knife – scars [15a₁] and both your ears [15a ₂]
	A18/19		Are all relics of your first comings]
	A20/21	15a1	Serrating down your back and front like beak of the sword fish]
	A23	15a2	[Notched as a bondsman to this house]
	A23	16	Then Step in
	A23	17	Step in
	A24	18	And Stay
	A25	19	Forher body is tired, tired
	A26	20	her milk (is) going sour
		21	Where many more mouths gladden the heart.

Text2 (table ₁b)

Stanza	Line	Clause n°	Clause
A	A1/2 A3 A3/4	1.	In vain your bangles cast charmed circles at my feet
		2.	I am Abiku,
		3	Calling for the first and the repeated time.
B	B5/6	4	Must I weep for goats and cowries,
	B7	5	(Must I weep)for goats palm oil and the sprinkled ash?
	B8	6	Yams do not sprout in amulets to earth Abiku's limbs
C	C9	7	So when the snail is burnt in his shell,
	C10	8	Whet the heated fragment,
	C10/11	9	Brand me deeply on the breast.
	C11	10	You must know him
	C12	11	When Abiku calls again.
D	D13	12	I am the squirrel teeth
	D13/14	13	Cracked the riddle of the palm
	D14/15	14	Remember this,
	D15/16	15	Anddig me deeper still into the god's swollen foot
E	E17/18	16	Once and the repeated time, (I am) ageless
	E18/19	17	Though I puke
	E19/20	18	And when you pour libations,
	E20	19	Each finger points me near the way [19 a]
		[19 al]	[I came,]
F	F21	19a2	[where,the ground is wet with mourning
	F22	19a3	white dew suckles flesh-birds
	F23	19a4	evening befriends the spider [19a4a]
	F23/24	19a4a	trapping flies in wind – froth;]
G	G25	19a5	(It is) Night,
	G25/26	19a6	And [Abiku sucks the oil from lamps]
	G26/27	20	motherI'll be the suppliant snake coiled on the doorstep yours (will be) the killing cry
	G28	21	
H	H29	22	The ripest fruit was saddest;
	H30	23	WhereI crept,
	H30	24	The warmth was closing.
	H31	25	In the silence of webs, Abiku moans, [25a]
	H31/32	[25a]	[Shaping mounds from the yolk

B-Study Corpus

Abiku (text₁)   Abiku (text₂)

1. Coming and going these several Seasons,
2. Do stay out on the baobab tree,
3. Follow where you please your kindred spirits
4. If indoors it is not enough for you.
5. True, it leaks through the thatch
6. When floods brim banks,
7. And the bats and the owls
8. Often tear in at night through the eaves,
9. And at harmattan, the bamboo walls
10. Are ready tinder for the fire
11. That dries the fresh fish up on the rack
12. Still, it's been the healthy sock
13. To several fingers, to many more will be
14. Who reach to the sun.
15. No longer then bestride the threshold
16. But step in and stay
18. Serrating down your back and front
19. like beak of the sword-fish,
20. And both your ears notched
21. as a bondsman to this house,
22. Are all relics of your first comings?
23. Then step in, step in and stay
24. For her body is tired,
25. Tired, her milk going sour
26. Where many more mouths gladden the heart.
John Pepper CLARK (1965)

29. The ripest fruit was saddest;
30. Where I crept, the warmth was cloying
31. In the silence of webs, Abiku moans, shaping
32 Mounds from the yolk.**Wole SOYINKA (1965)**

1. In Vain your bangles cast
2. Charmed circles at my feed
3.I am Abiku, calling for the first
4. And the repeated time.
5. Must I weep for goats and cowries
6. For palm oil and the sprinkled ash?
7. Yams do not sprout in amulets
8. To earth Abiku's limbs.
9. So when the snail is burnt in his shell
10. Whet the heated fragment, brand me.
11. Deeply on the breast. You must know
12. When Abiku calls again.
14. The riddle of palm. Remember
15. This, and dig me deeper still into
16. The god's swollen foot.
17. Once and the repeated time, ageless
18. Though I puke; and when you pour
19. Libations, each finger points me
20. The way I came, where.
21. The ground is wet with mourning
22. White dew suckles flesh-birds
23. Evening befriends the spider, trapping
24. Flies in wind-froth;
25. Night and Abiku sucks the oil
26. from lamps. Mothers! I'll be the
27. Suppliant snake coiled on the doorstep
     28. Yours the killing cry.