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The Metaphor of the Green Bottles

By Arthur Zulu

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Lapsus memoria is Latin. Memory lose is English. Either choice is my woe. Writ plain: there are few things that I can remember these days. Especially of my early school years. But I will not forget some things about my last elementary school named L.A. Primary School. In those days, no one bothered about the meaning of the acronym, L.A. We proudly beat our chests and announced to other pupils whose schools sounded a mouthful that we were children of L.A. And come to think of it, L.A. meant Local Authority, not Los Angeles the real L.A. But let me try to recollect a few things about my L.A. :

One hot afternoon, a child, no a man for he was 7 years older than his teacher had drawn out a long machete to behead his class teacher who had offended him for some reason; Snakes were always traversing the green fields (the school was surrounded by a forest); We drank water from a poll of cool water which they say holds the belly (God knows how many microorganisms that washed down our gullets); And the town where this school was located was famous, for the natives had chained the Lander Brothers Richard and John two white explorers who had been there to trace the tributary of River Niger to the Atlantic Ocean. The chain the only tourist attraction in the town was said to be on display in the king's palace (I never got to see it).

I am not about to write on The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger. Albert Chinualumogu Achebe knew the whiteman who contemplated it. I meant Chinua Achebe who wrote Things Fall Apart. Writers prefer shortened names poetic nomenclatures, like my L.A. But before things start falling apart, let me mention one thing that I would not forget about that school not an incident, but an innocent song.

It was at L.A. that I first learnt the song about the ten green bottles hanging on the wall. That teacher who nearly lost his head taught us that song. When the sun would be at its meridian, he would rouse us up the sleeping children to sing and dance Ten Green Bottles Hanging on the Wall. He was an accomplished singer and dancer himself, and we tried to outdo him as we wriggled our waists, sang ourselves hoarse, and drummed away at our desks happy for the only free opportunity to disturb the peace.

The Metaphor of the Green Bottles

One thing which none dared to ask, however, was why the ten green bottles hanging on the wall came tumbling to the ground. Was it that they were not well fastened to the wall, or was it that the bottles would always fall, tie them as you may? We just supposed it to be their destiny and pitied them no small a pity.

But the smiling teacher he was always smiling told us that it was a poem. And we presumed that strange things happen in poetry. Consider the bizarre poem about the three blind mice which ran after the farmer's wife. Surprisingly, the cruel mother with no milk of human kindness in her breast took a carving knife and compounded their affliction by slicing off their tails! Questions: How did the three blind mice find their way? Why were they following the heels of the farmer's wife? Never mind, it's

poetry. . .

But I look at the ten green bottles hanging on the wall and look at them again. Methinks it is not a poem, but an allegory about life. Men are the green bottles, the wall represents the world, and the ground on which they fall is the graveman's final destination. In this regard, every man or woman or child walking on the face of this cursed earth, is an accident waiting waiting to happen. It could be in a space shuttle like the Challenger (dead bodies turned to orbiting UFO's), or in a Russian submarine (entombed in frigid waters), or worse in a Chernobyl-style explosion (buried in a suspended grave).

But there is another version of the green bottles concerning the story of a condemned criminal. When asked about his last request, the man, intent on delaying his death, asked to be allowed to sing Ten Million Green Bottles Hanging on the Wall. They obliged him. The executioner slept and woke. And after 4 weeks the condemned singer was somewhere around nine million nine thousand and something green bottles. It is an interesting version of the song. Yet, the song ended and the singer of the longest song in history kept his date with the hangman.

Everything about this world is refuse plain waste. Sleep, wake, and finally expire. Even if you were singing Ten Billion Green Bottles, the song would end someday and you would get your deserved quietus. So if you have not done your will, indite it, NOW! Because you one of the ten, no, six billion green bottles hanging on the wall will soon dead-crash to mother earth, waiting for the beneficiaries of your will to bring the rear. Your only last honor is the red earth that is if you are not some Hindu who would rather their corpse was cremated and scattered in the Ganges.

But the fact is that red earth is in short supply these days. Man's final place of repose seems to be a dark, oily earth. He that didn't oil his lips alive because of poverty, is now soaked eternally bones and all in a cemetery polluted by crude oil spills. That is if he wasn't buried in a shallow, watery grave the country graveyards are flooded now (no thanks to global warming). What then is your inheritance in this earth, you son of Adam?

For soon you are going to lie on your deathbed and wish that your loved ones saved you from the cold hands of Death. But they would not be able only content to watch your last moments and close your eyes.

Or soon you are to sit beside a dying friend, your child, wife or husband. And they would implore you to

The Metaphor of the Green Bottles

rescue them from the Last Visitor. But you would only shed tears of shame and see them off to sheol, and live forever in disgrace the torment of your inability to deliver a dear one from hades' door.

So, when next you hear your little ones sing about those ten green bottles hanging on the wall, never nod your head in approbation or tap your feet ecstatically on the floor to the rhythm of the innocent poem. Nor should it ever cross your mind that GREEN is a symbol of regeneration or longevity. Like the "everlasting" sequoia tree of North America that can tarry for centuries. Rather, is about YOUR LAST RITES. That, I think, is the metaphor of the green bottles, hanging precariously on the wall!

ARTHUR ZULU is an editor, book reviewer, author of "CHASING SHADOWS!" "HOW TO WRITE A BESTSELLER" and "A LETTER TO NOAH" soon to be published by Authorhouse.

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Poetry Techniques

By Gary R. Hess

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The style of writing poetry differs from person to person; long or short meters, three or four lines to a stanza. But the great thing is, no matter how a poem is written it still holds great emotion. Some techniques used in poetry are onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, rhyming, simile and metaphor.

Onomatopoeia is one of the easiest to learn and use (but not spell). The definition of onomatopoeia is a word imitating a sound. For example; "buzz", "moo" and "beep". This can be used in a variety of ways giving the reader a "hands on" feel.

One technique that you might be familiar with is alliteration. This procedure is used by starting three or more words with the same sound. An example of this would be "The crazy crackling crops." The three words don't have to have the exact same beginning to have this effect.

The next style is assonance. It is defined as a repetition of vowel sounds within syllables with changing consonants. This is also used in many different circumstances. One would be "tilting at windmills." Notice the vowels within each syllable sound the same.

Rhyming is probably the most well-known technique used. However unlike popular belief, it does not

The Metaphor of the Green Bottles

need to be within a poem to make it a poem. It is what it is.. a technique.

As for similes, they are often used within poetry. They are an expression that compares one thing to another. A paradigm of this would be "The milk tasted like pickles." This method is used in all forms of poetry and generally has the words "like" or "as."

The last but not least style is metaphor. A metaphor is a word or phrase used one way to mean another. Metaphors are sometimes hard to spot and take some thinking to figure out, but they give writers more power to express their thoughts about a certain situation. One famous case where a metaphor is used is within "The Raven" by Edgar Allen Poe. In fact, not only is it found within the story, the story itself is a metaphor of memory and the constant reminder of the narrator's loss.

These techniques are seen throughout history within both famous and amateur poems alike. To have a full grasp of poetry onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, rhyming, simile and metaphor should be household words.

Gary R. Hess is a writer for



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