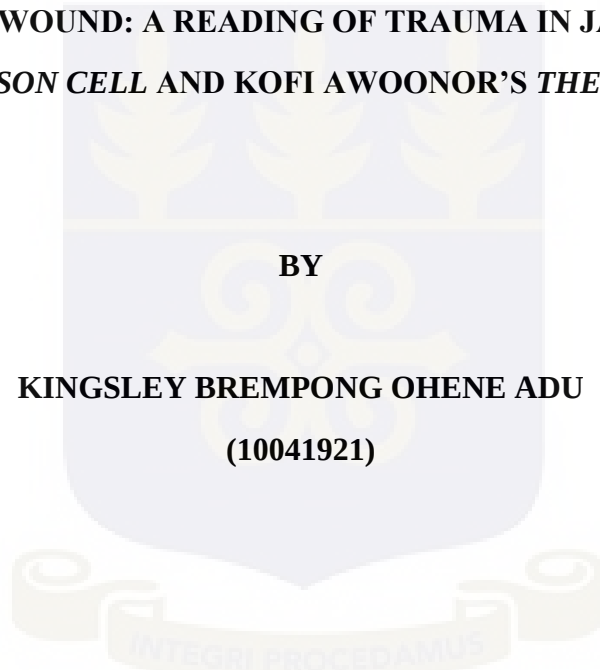


UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

**RETHINKING THE WOUND: A READING OF TRAUMA IN JAMES MATTHEWS’
POEMS FROM A PRISON CELL AND KOFI AWOONOR’S *THE HOUSE BY THE SEA***

BY

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**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY ENGLISH DEGREE**

JULY, 2016

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is the product of my original research, and it has not been published or presented, in whole or in part, for the award of a degree anywhere in the world, and that all references to other works have been duly acknowledged.

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Date.....

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the Almighty God and to all men and women languishing in prison.



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My sincerest gratitude goes to Jehovah God for His immeasurable grace which has enabled me to complete this work.

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the possibility of expressing and confronting trauma in the critical site of prison through the medium of poetry. Historically rooted in Holocaust studies, trauma has been conceptualized as a psychological wound that cannot be expressed nor healed through any media, least of all, literature. In response to the call of literary theorists for a theory of narrative that incorporates healing, Masterson et al. contend that the revelatory and therapeutic power of literature can help extend the conceptual frontiers of trauma and, accordingly, proceed to explore different narratives from this perspective. This incipient project does not explore prison poetry, leading this researcher to pose the following questions: To what extent can poetry express trauma in all its complexities and ambiguities? To what extent does poetry serve as a therapeutic medium for people exposed to trauma?

To answer these questions, this study examines James Matthews' *Poems from a Prison Cell* and Kofi Awoonor's *The House by the Sea* as sites of trauma that offer opportunities for expressing and confronting it. To this end, the study appropriates the trauma insights of Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Sigmund Freud as well as Stephen Springman's concept of the listening public. Close textual analysis and inter-textual references constitute the basic methodology this study uses to reach its conclusions, while also drawing on secondary sources to support its argument. The study extends the conceptual frontiers of trauma and adds to scholarship on James Matthews and Kofi Awoonor. It recommends that a wide-ranging analysis of the poetic works of different categories of prisoners across the globe be conducted to determine similarities and differences in their response to prison trauma.

Key Words: expressing, confronting, trauma, prison, Holocaust, psychological, wound, healing

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

This study explores the possibility of expressing and confronting trauma in the critical space of prison through the medium of poetry. Trauma has its origins in “traumat”, a Greek word for a physical wound. The word has been extended to mean a psychological wound a person sustains as a result of exposure to an unanticipated, unprecedented catastrophic event or multiple events that may be over or ongoing (De Veaux 259, Caruth 156). Mostly used synonymously with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), trauma has been conceived as a wound which is experienced belatedly (Caruth 7-8), but there is also a consensus that it can also refer to an ongoing crisis (Caruth 156; De Veaux 259). This thesis appropriates these two notions of trauma. Again, while trauma can be caused either by natural or man-made catastrophes, this thesis focuses on the latter.

Drawing on an array of western experiences particularly the Holocaust, trauma has been framed as a paradox that problematizes the traditional notions of reparation and cure. This paradox has essentially caused trauma to transcend disciplinary boundaries with literature, psychiatry, history and sociology, all invoked to assist in unraveling the impasse of trauma (Caruth 4). The paradox is constructed around the themes of memory, history and testimony. A pivotal concept of trauma, memory has been divided into narrative and traumatic memory by Pierre Janet with the former referring to mental constructs or schemas used by people to meaningfully process new events while the former disrupts the ability of existing frameworks to process them into consciousness

(qtd. in van der Kolk and van der Hart 160-163). Traumatic memory is realized as two contradictory pathologies, namely, intrusive and possessive reenactment of the traumatic event with all its harrowing circumstances and the elision of the event from consciousness (Greenberg and van der Kolk 191). Another sense in which the idea of traumatic elision can be explained is the lack of comprehension of the event by the victim. Put differently, though the victim may be able to recall the event, he may not be able to understand it well enough to decisively act to liberate himself. This is what Dori Laub and Cathy Caruth mean when they write that the Holocaust occasioned a “collapse of witnessing” (65) and a “collapse of its understanding” (7) respectively. While the reliving of the event renders its victim helpless, the elision of the event from consciousness makes it impossible to testify about it, summarily invalidating the testimonies of survivors of traumatic experiences, particularly those of the Holocaust.

Invalidating the testimonies of survivors goes against the conception of trauma as a historical artefact. Theorists such as Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud and later scholars including Caruth and Felman perceive the traumatic event as an external force that floods the coping apparatus of the sufferer. Emphasizing her belief that trauma is caused by a catastrophic external event, Caruth asserts: “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an... event” (5). This notion is nowhere more strongly suggested than in Caruth’s *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) as well as Felman and Laub’s *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992). Significantly, the perception of the Holocaust in many circles as a singular event which defies all conventional frames of reference (Felman and Laub 85; Laub 65; Plunka 13; Schumacher 4) has helped to implicitly equate it to trauma, excluding other catastrophic events from the field of trauma studies or relegating them to its peripheries.

As a result of this, scholars such as Susanna Radstone and Ruth Leys have proposed an alternative way of conceiving trauma, moving from equating it to an event to considering it as caused by an event which provokes unconscious fears (Radstone 14-22). This study bridges these two polarized positions noting that if the defense mechanism of the psyche cannot stave off the overwhelming impact of an external event, it seems unlikely that it will be able to hem in internal fears and desires.

A variation on the notion of unconscious trauma is provided by Sigmund Freud who asserts that there is trans-generational transmission of traumatic events “witnessed by early human beings and absorbed into the human psyche since the dawn of time” (Visser 273). What makes Freud’s hypothesis radically different from the two schools of thought noted already is that it sets the event in mythic time and not in history. Although Freud’s concept has ahistorical roots and does not emphasize role of the perpetrator, this study finds it useful because of its idea of trans-generational trauma. Interestingly, all the theorists considered so far agree that there is a dissociation of the traumatic event, posing a monolithic threat to the sufferers’ ability to reclaim the experience through testimony which is so fundamental to healing.

Elizabeth Jelin defines testimony from two perspectives, namely, as a process that involves a person who survives an overwhelming experience to recount it at a later date and, secondly, as a process in which an onlooker bears witness to the suffering of other people (61). Jelin’s conception of testimony, in a way, overlaps with Dori Laub’s model of witnessing which recognizes three levels, to wit, witnessing to oneself, witnessing to other’s experiences, and witnessing to the process of witnessing itself. In view of these conceptions, testimony and witnessing will be used interchangeably in this study. For Laub, testimony transcends the mere tabulation of facts and information to include the experience of “living through testimony, of

giving testimony” (70). In other words, a survivor must be viscerally engaged in the process of testifying in order to reclaim the experience and reconstitute his or her fractured self (ibid.).

However, testimony is dogged by a number of challenges including fragmentation and distortion of the event (Herman 1), emotional contagion (Caruth 10), and traumatic amnesia (ibid.). Nonetheless, these seemingly insuperable challenges are surmounted through the agency of literature which has the capacity to “mobilize ... a traumatic legacy” (153). Literature’s capacity to mobilize trauma is predicated upon Judith Herman’s hypothesis that traumatic feelings must be transformed into words if they are to be shared and dealt with (1). This is what he calls narrative memory. Gabrielle Schwab confirms the cathartic effect of literature by noting that “... fiction, poetry, and film can create a more protected space to explore the effects of violence” (5). Then she illustrates this position with an anecdote of how writing about violence counteracts “...some of the helplessness I have experienced...” (6). According to Petra Caslavova, “Poetry brought the prisoners [of Nazi concentration camps] intellectual distraction and moments of relief” (31) in addition to helping them fulfill their obligation of creating historical testimony “...to resist, to assert individual agency, the will to continue the Jewish tradition of witnessing or to provide a memorial” (31-32). One of the ways literature achieves this feat by textually constituting both the addresser and the addressee, what Stephen Clingman defines as the “listening public” in his treatise on Nadine Gordimer (170).

In spite of literature’s role in making testimony possible, trauma critics’ and theorists’ attitude toward it is ambivalent. While literature’s role in expressing trauma is acknowledged, there is also a tacit effort to hold it at bay. This finds its most vocal expression immediately after the Holocaust in Theodore Adorno’s contention that “After Auschwitz...to write poetry is barbaric” (qtd. in Howe 429). His assertion is underlined by the belief that the Holocaust has no precedent

in history or mythology; in other words, the Holocaust is an event that cannot be explained using the available religious, business, political, social and psychological knowledge. With this understanding, he believes that aestheticizing the Holocaust is bound to trivialize it by detaching the historical facts from the affects that occasion a visceral understanding of the event (Plunka 15; Howe 429). The result of all this is that what mainstream trauma critics and theorists accept as authentic Holocaust literature makes no provision for people to be able to confront trauma. As an illustration, Albert Camus' novel *The Plague* portrays Holocaust trauma symbolically as an incurable plague that "closely affected the life of a whole populace..." (6), which the narrator who doubles as a character (the Doctor) tries to bear witness to.

The projection of trauma as a gangrenous wound brooking no healing has prompted radical theorists to call for a re-imagination of trauma to accommodate mending and healing. Gabriele Schwab, in particular, has called for "a theory of narratives that deals with the paradox of telling what cannot be told" (Schwab 48). Schwab's call is an attempt to bridge theory and practice and, in this way, benefits from Judith Herman's practical steps to dealing effectively with trauma as outlined in her ground-breaking book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992). Herman's landmark work, apart from outlining the historical trajectory of trauma, provides a model for dealing with trauma. Among other things, the first stage of her three-tier model of coping with trauma includes developing a roadmap, stabilizing one's body and relationships, and developing and tapping into one's inner resources to manage the symptoms of trauma. The second stage recommended by Herman entails engaging with traumatic memories to alleviate their pain and working through the anguish of traumatic experiences. Her final step encourages the victim to reconnect with other people, to engage in useful activities, and to create alternative memories (Herman 133-214). Considering Herman and

other models of coping with trauma will provide any theory of narratives the appropriate resources with which to engage the paradox of trauma.

In response to Schwab's call, Masterson et al. read mainly fictional narratives seeking to re-envision the borderlands of trauma theory by exploring fresh geographical, historical, and philosophical perspectives, an attempt that largely weans trauma from its anchor in western thinking (1-5). Even though genres such as war poetry, short stories, and novels are examined for possibilities of confronting trauma, prison poetry is noticeably absent from this incipient exploration. Yet, prison is a space in which poetry serves as a medium for responding to the disorganization of confinement.

Prison is a facility which holds persons sentenced to one year or more with jails handling persons who do less than a year (Rowe 17). However, this thesis collapses the distinction between the two while also recognizing that there are other alignments of confinement such as house arrest and police states. It also collapses the distinction between confinement by detention and confinement by sentencing. Imprisonment is caused by two major factors, namely, infringement on common law and political oppression. Larson has noted that some inmates "entered prison as common criminals..." (Larson 154) in which case the aim is obviously to reform the prisoner. Conversely, imprisonment can result from resistance of people including artists against repressive regimes, which may be framed under colonial or post-colonial contexts. Such socio-political frameworks are characterized by so great a subjugation of the masses by the colonial or post-colonial administration that human rights are eroded away, leadership plunder the state, and national development is stymied (Rotimi 126-128). Under these unwholesome conditions, politicians and artists, the vanguard of the people's rights, are propelled to mount various forms of protest against these repressive regimes (Rotimi 129-131). To quell such resistance, the

tyrannical governments use the security services to bludgeon these non-conformists into submission, culminating in some being imprisoned and others being forced into exile (Mugo 84).

In his poem “Chronicle of Our Rhyming Exile”, Jack Mapange talks about the searing racism and sense of displacement exiles endure (41-44). The separation and racism designed into the exile experience comes with its own psychological baggage, some of which Micere Githae Mugo recognizes as extreme anger, a sense of loss, and an accusing conscience, effects which are similar to those of physical confinement (Mugo 88-90). It is for these reasons that Kofi Anyidoho in “Prison as Exile / Exile as Prison: Circumstance, Metaphor, and a Paradox of Modern African Literatures”, his eloquent introduction to his edited collection mentioned above, an anthology of prison and exile experiences of various artists, describes “prison and exile as two sides of the experience of oppression...” (3). Mawuli Adzei makes this thinking on exile more pronounced in his terse description of exile as “...prison without bars” (*Testament of the Season* 31). Much as this description largely collapses the distinction between these twin concepts, it implicitly maintains the basic difference between them, that is, exile is marked only by mental constraints whereas prison is defined by physical confinement. At any rate, this thesis finds the classification of exile as prison very pertinent.

Whether designed to reform, punish, or dehumanize the prisoner, physical confinement primarily isolates the prisoner and dehumanizes him (Mandela 194); whatever his moral stripe, the prisoner begins to experience an excoriation of his humanity with the pronouncement of judgment or with his or her detention as the case may be (Larson 146). This is achieved through deprivation and isolation built into the entire prison apparatus including prison architecture and the ruinous material and emotional conditions enveloping imprisonment.

Prison architecture- high walls and cells or boxes- is designed to isolate the prisoner and to keep the public out (ibid.). The high walls keep the public from prying into the activities of prison and also prevent the prisoner from associating with the public. Similarly, the cell, cage or box in which the prisoner is confined performs this ambivalent function of keeping out the jailor and keeping in the prisoner. It is in this sense that prison has been dubbed as a “complete prison universe” (Breytenbach 276).

Having to brave isolation and tagged as inferior by the general populace, prisoners endure harrowing conditions including torture, banal routines, loss of heterosexual relationships, insanitary conditions, overcrowding, and poor food, among others (Cardina 109-110). While it is a truism that local conditions in prisons differ from one geopolitical area to another, this researcher holds that conditions prevailing in prison can never match those outside it.

Scholars may agree on the generally deplorable conditions in prison, but they may not so easily agree on the psychological impact of imprisonment, leading to the formation of two diametrically opposed schools of thought with different alignments of these two streams. One school of thought holds that the psychopathologies of imprisonment are insubstantial even where subjects have spent considerable time in solitary confinement (De Veaux 258). Their position is clearly spelt out: the material and spatial conditions of incarceration do not inflict disorienting psychological effects on inmates. Not recognizing the capacity of prison to cause havoc is oversimplification of the issue. As a result, this view is challenged by another school of thought which subscribes to the notion of imprisonment causing deleterious mental effects on prisoners. These critics cite helplessness, mental impairment, loneliness, depression, among others, as psychopathologies that underlie the incarceration experience. These symptoms have been corroborated by people such as Albie Sachs, Dennis Brutus, and Nelson Mandela who have done

time (Brutus 215-216; Mandela 194; Sachs 99). Clearly, even where the inmate does not evince symptoms of psychological disarray, it is clear that he has had to stage a massive fight to retain his consciousness; Jack Mapanje certainly endorses this thinking with his assertion that elements of orality “helped me repair the physical and *psychological chaos* brought about by three and a half years of incarceration in Banda’s prison...” (23, italics mine).

In view of the harrowing material and psychological realities of prison, how do inmates survive? Inmates anchor their survival to a number of strategies, such as singing, fantasy, and reconnection with the outside world, to mention but a few. A number of inmates take recourse to writing to salvage their memory and regain their sense of self and purpose (Harlow 131). Some of these discover writing during their incarceration (Larson 154) whereas others are writers who have been incarcerated (van Vuuren 46). Mapanje identifies three kinds of writing according to the relative facility of producing them, namely, those produced in prisons which facilitate writing, those produced in prisons which repress writing, and those which occupy the gray area between the two (24). On the whole, prison writing has flourished in all the major genres: autobiography, memoirs, fiction and verse. Examples include Dennis Brutus’ *Letters to Martha* (1968), Don Matterra’s *Memory Is the Weapon* (1987), Ruth First’s *117 Days* (1965), and Wole Soyinka’s *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (1972). Nonetheless, it is possible for prison writing to be done by artists who have never experienced incarceration. Mawuli Adzei’s “Christmas in Guantanamo” and “Penitentiary” stand as classic examples of this type of prison writing.

While noting that there are several categories of prisoners (criminals, political prisoners, prisoners of war, etc.), this study focuses on the verse of artists imprisoned for political reasons. It is necessary to clarify that though the various genres differ in certain respects, they share a

commonality of characteristic features, and the knowledge of some will prove rewarding to this research. Doran Larson observes that “prison writing is... indexical of the precise conditions in which it is produced” (145), a quality which enables it to reflect the prevailing conditions in a particular geopolitical space. The veracity of Larson’s contention is affirmed by Mapanje who recognizes that his prison experiences differ from others “mainly in their locational details”. An obvious advantage of this scope of prison writing is that it captures the specific ideological framework within which the prison space is located; for example, Dennis Brutus’ *Letters to Martha* (1968) reflects South African Apartheid and the numerous problems such as subjugation of the blacks, gross human rights abuses, and arbitrary imprisonment of the political opponents of the minority white government, that define it. For Harlow, writing of such nature “...seeks to alter the relationships of power that are maintained by coercive, authoritarian systems of state control and domination” (131).

Conversely, prison literature shares a global poetics and coupled with its capacity to be self-reflexive, it mirrors the impact of the experience on the artist. Correspondingly, one defining metaphor in prison poetry is the excoriation of the artists’ humanity (Davies 159). Also, the self-reflexivity of prison literature mandates the writer to use the first person singular Pronoun “I” which is at once personal, national and global, so that the “I” of prison poetry can reflect the writers personal experience, that of his community as well as the circumstance of any man or woman anywhere (Larson 148).

Prison poetry does not only mirror prison conditions but it is also repellent of it (ibid.); Mapanje’s *Chattering Wagtails in a Mikuyu Prison* and Dennis Brutus’ *Letters to Martha* readily corroborate this fact. Survival strategies must be inexorably linked to “movement, with writing and with self” (Davies 143). As a result, survival strategies commonly deployed in prison

literature are captured in the themes and motifs of religion, reconnection with the outside, re-negotiation of time and space, nature, among others (van Vuuren 51). All these strategies are premised on the cathartic effect of poetry which chimes with William Wordsworth's observation that poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility" with the exception that prison is not a tranquil environment.

It is clear that prison literature provides a good canvas for the interplay between prison trauma and coping mechanisms. To what extent is trauma expressed and how effective is poetry in providing any possibilities for working through or healing trauma?

This thesis engages James Matthews' *Poems from a Prison Cell* (2001), originally published under the title *Pass Me a Meatball*, Jones (1977), and Kofi Awoonor's *The House by the Sea* (1978) as sites of trauma focusing on the possibility of coping with it. These two texts have been chosen because of their accessibility and the contemporaneity of their production in addition to overwhelming textual evidence regarding their suitability which is fully discussed under the section on Justification for the Selection of the Texts. James Matthews (1929-1998) writes *Poems from a Prison Cell* when he is detained in Victor Vester prison in 1976 for six months (Sahistory.org). In a similar fashion, Kofi Awoonor (1935-2013) produces *The House by the Sea* mostly during his detention in Ussher Fort prison "...on charges of treason" (Adjei 389). A discussion of the sociopolitical framework of prison as well as the conditions of imprisonment are discussed in Chapter Three under the section on History.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

No critical attention has been given to poetry as a medium for expressing and confronting trauma in the prison space from a trauma-theoretical perspective (Masterson et al. 4). Following Theodore Adorno's contention that "After Auschwitz ... to write a poem is barbaric" (qtd in Howe 429), many trauma theorists and critics generally perceive literature as an unsuitable medium to express or confront trauma or any Holocaust experience because trauma is conceived as *unrepresentable* ((not capable of being retold since traumatic events are not available for conscious recall). There is also the lingering fear that literature has the capacity to trivialize catastrophic experiences. Thus, literary works that these theorists and critics accept as authentically reflecting Holocaust or traumatic experiences brook no healing. This has prompted Gabrielle Schwab to call for "a theory of traumatic narratives that deals with the paradox of telling what cannot be told" (48).

Masterson et al. respond to this proposition by reading narratives from the geopolitical blocs of North America and South Africa that undertake the improbable task of "disentangling bodies and words from the traumas holding them" (2) in a bid to find the best strategies for confronting trauma. Masterson and his group read literary works drawn from genres such as short stories, novels, prison memoir, and war poetry that portray traumatic events across history including the genocidal cleansing of the Native American Pequots by the Puritan Colony, the Vietnam War, Aushwitz, and Apartheid in South Africa. This groundbreaking project offers fruitful and distinctive insights into how narratives on trauma can hold out the possibility of working through, mending or healing trauma to people exposed to such events. Noticeably absent from this roll-call is poetry produced in the traumatic site of prison. This research therefore seeks to fill this lacuna by engaging the prison poetry of James Matthews and Kofi Awoonor.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions below address the concerns of the study:

- To what extent can poetry express trauma in all its complexities and ambiguities?
- To what extent does poetry serve as a therapeutic medium for people exposed to trauma?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study intends to examine James Matthews' *Poems from a Prison Cell* and Kofi Awoonor's *The House by the Sea* with the aim of exploring the possibilities of confronting prison trauma through the agency of poetry. To this end, the research hopes to:

- Determine how trauma is configured in prison, focusing on the tropes and motifs that capture it.
- Examine the poetic strategies imprisoned artists deploy to confront personal and historical trauma.

1.4 Hypothesis

This thesis holds that trauma can be revealed and dealt with by people who are exposed to it. In this respect, the study also holds that the revealing and redeeming capacities of poetry offer trauma victims the opportunity to manifest and confront trauma through testimony.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is important because:

- It redefines the boundaries of trauma theory. Trauma, in mainstream conceptualization, is defined in terms of dissociated memories which render testimony virtually impossible for trauma victims. As a result, trauma sufferers, theoretically, are confronted with a block of unassailable and monolithic silence because of their inability to consciously recall traumatic experiences. This research re-envision the borders of trauma within the prison domain to incorporate healing through the agency of poetry.
- It also fosters interest in trauma studies, particularly in Africa, as this research widens the frontiers of trauma theory. Such interest will prod post-colonial African societies to equip themselves with the requisite psychological tools to properly rehabilitate and integrate prisoners into the broader society after their incarceration.
- It will also contribute to scholarship on Matthews and Awoonor. Though a fertile field for critical exploration, Matthews' work, as far as this researcher knows, is grossly under researched. Apart from a fleeting observation in Helize Van Vuuren's "Labyrinth of loneliness": Breyten Breytenbach's prison poetry (1976–1985)', under the original title *Pass Me a Meatball*, Jones (1977) in relation to its suitability for psychological probe, *Poems from a prison cell* has not had its due share of critical attention. It must be noted that van Vuuren mentions Matthews' text in relation to the pathologies of dissociation, an aspect of trauma, but she does not explore it from a full-blown trauma-theoretical perspective. Awoonor's prison work has also been studied by scholars including Mawuli Adjei and Martin Tucker. However, none of them has done a full-scale study on it,

focusing on how trauma is expressed and confronted. Engaging these texts using trauma theory provides useful insights into how trauma is configured within the prison space, and elucidates which opportunities exist to facilitate closure to trauma.

1.6 Theoretical Framework and its Justification

While acknowledging that there are various trauma theorists, each of whom has his or her nuances regarding trauma, this thesis appropriates Cathy Caruth's trauma insights as its main theoretical framework. It also draws on the trauma notions of Dori Laub, Judith Herman and Sigmund Freud as well as the Stephen Clingman's concept of the listening public as adjunct theories. These theoretical tools have been adequately discussed under the Background to the Study.

This researcher's decision to use analytical pluralism is informed by the simple fact that no one theory can provide the framework within which the issues raised by this thesis can be adequately discussed. Fundamental to this study is Cathy Caruth's model of trauma drawn from her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. It is useful for this research because, in the estimation of Elissa Marder, Caruth's description of trauma is clear and coherent in its presentation of trauma's conceptual conundrum (1) which revolves round the themes of memory, history and testimony. Apart from its wide scope, this model is adopted because it focuses mostly on clinical pathologies of trauma as outlined in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1987) first published in 1980 in an effort to frame the inner world of people exposed to catastrophic events such as the Vietnam War. Undue reliance on her model therefore problematizes the consideration of harrowing events in

non-western contexts as traumatic. Using this theory enables this study to engage this theory to determine the convergences and divergences it has with other events.

Although Caruth touches on testimony, it is not as detailed as Dori Laub's model which adds a third level of witnessing: witnessing to the process of witnessing. Laub's model is in turn bolstered by Stephen Clingman's conception of a textual audience as a prerequisite to witnessing. Again, Freud's notion of trans-generational trauma provides the needed prop for exploring cultural trauma.

Lastly, Judith Herman's model is one of the first to posit that narratives are essential to confronting trauma. It is also the most wide-ranging in its exploration of specific strategies on dealing with trauma.

It is the belief of this researcher that these theories serve as a good framework within which to answer the research questions posed in this study.

1.7 Methodology

This is a qualitative study that appropriates both analysis of the primary texts and references drawn from the inter-textual world of prison and trauma texts. Though James Matthews and Kofi Awoonor have many literary texts to their credit, this thesis focuses on *Poems from a Prison Cell* (2001) and *The House by the Sea* (1978) respectively, and data is accordingly drawn from them. The thesis analyzes this data within the framework of notions of trauma popularized at different times by Caruth, Laub, Freud, and Herman as well as Springman's concept of the "listening public". It also cites from the literature review and other secondary sources to bolster its argument.

To answer the research questions, data is grouped under the three themes of trauma, namely, history, memory, and testimony. Data under history and memory gauge the extent to which poetry expresses trauma, emphasizing the literary tropes that poetry employs to achieve this aim. In view of this, data placed under history seeks to reconstruct the event (imprisonment and its sociopolitical context) to determine the extent to which it traumatizes. Memory focuses on the impact of the traumatic event on those exposed to it.

The data compiled under testimony engages the second research question by focusing on the effectiveness of the strategies used by the poets in combating trauma.

1.8 Justification for the Selection of the Texts

Some trauma theorists have looked with suspicion at the capacity of literature, particularly poetry, to accommodate trauma with the argument that capturing the suffering of people aesthetically is bound to vitiate the significance and wholeness of such an ordeal. Nonetheless, internal evidence of Matthews' *Poems from a Prison Cell* graphically captures the ordeal of the persona in a way that sends shivers through the spines of readers. Awoonor's *Poems from a Prison Cell* presents a personal portrait of the persona as he is confronted with imprisonment, thereby providing an appropriate canvas for engaging trauma in a new light. To be precise it captures the experience at the moment of its occurrence, whereas trauma theory, in the main, concentrates on the post-traumatic disorder occasioned by the event.

This challenges the conceptualization of the traumatic event as leaving "no trace of a registration of any kind" (Caruth 6) on the consciousness of the victim at the precise moment of its occurrence. The personae in the various poems are ever-conscious of the event as it unfolds, they

are unusually aware of the “coldness of my cell”, “confinement in hellholes”, and “subterranean chambers”, among others. Instead of the elision of the event from consciousness, the personae are confronted with the pervasive awareness of the harrowing material and psychological realities of prison. What then is obvious is the superimposition of the traumatic event onto the pre-incarceration memories of the persona. To illustrate, the persona confesses that he is “trying to trace memories // that i cannot place in / patterned form to picture my past” (“struggling through the miasma” 3, 7-8). The severity of the process is carried by the alliterative use of the aspirated consonant “p” in “place”, “patterned”, “picture”, and “past”. In a way, this spontaneity is more indicative of the overpowering impact of the process than its unexpectedness.

While *Poems from a Prison Cell* portrays “the lived reality of prison” (Cronin n.p.), an individual’s encounter with the massive prison apparatus, there is a sense in which it also has a ring of universality round it. Thus, in Matthews’ collection, specific names and dates are elided so that the experience can pass off as that of any man or woman in a similar situation. This technique is useful precisely because it proves that trauma, while being caused by an external event, is itself an existential reality that cannot be conflated with any specific event as trauma theorists are wont to do. The amazing individuality and universality of the persona’s experience as well as his persistent cognizance of imprisonment provides a leeway for exploring *Poems from a Prison Poem* for avenues of confronting trauma.

Admittedly, the selection of Awoonor’s *The House by the Sea* may seem inapt for a study that focuses on trauma since it is not as pronounced as Matthews’ text in manifesting the effects of imprisonment on the inmate’s psyche. For example, unlike the persona in *Poem’s from a Prison Cell* who is consumed with fear for his own safety, a normative effect of prison trauma (De Veaux 266), Awoonor’s persona is consumed with “Fear, / for friends, comrades, / but never for

yourself” (“The Second Circle” 6-8). However, with the establishment of incarceration as traumatic (de Veaux 257), the persona successfully confronts personal trauma by appropriating several strategies such as engagement with natural minutiae, faith, and reconnection with the outside world, among others. Hence, *The House by the Sea* provides insights into how a person can preemptively deal with trauma.

Even more germane to its inclusion in this study is the fact that Awoonor’s collection of prison poetry highlights the collective trauma of African people featuring the postcolonial malaise of Africans and the ordeal of the Middle Passage felt by “parents, brothers and sisters, uncles and other relatives and friends who knew and cared for the captive. In a way, theirs was... a loss of deepest death” (Opoku-Agyemang 6-7). Prison is critical to the evocation of these traumatic memories and the evolution of a new perspective of the wider social order because the persona in Awoonor’s poem “The First Circle”, discloses that “...From my cell, I see a cold / hard world” (3-4) and “So this is the abcess [sic] that / hurts the nation- / jails, torture, blood / and hunger” (5-8). The persona’s experiences in prison become the prism through which he develops a critical perception of the world as unjust; one of these perceptions is that prison itself is an “abcess” that weakens the fibre of the nation. Presenting himself as a self-styled saviour, the persona prescribes solutions to the historical trauma of his race and nation, providing hope that trauma, whatever its configuration, can be effectively dealt with.

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that these two texts provide various manifestations of prison trauma, which serves as a good basis for this study.

1.9 Delimitations of the Study

This research focuses on poetic works produced in prison which highlight the harrowing traumatic impact of incarceration. Clearly, a study that seeks to extend the theoretical boundaries of trauma by exploring the revelatory and redemptive possibilities of prison poetry should have deployed a greater arsenal of poetic works from various geopolitical blocs. Since such a broad framework falls outside the scope of this study, it may be argued that the study is not representative enough. Nonetheless, Doran Larson has argued that though each prison space has local features, prisons form a transnational archipelago bound together by a commonality of features (143). Drawing on this argument, this researcher believes that the study is able to prove its hypothesis by focusing on Matthews' and Awoonor's texts.

Again, this thesis deals with artists imprisoned for political reasons rather than common law prisoners.

1.10 Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises five chapters. Chapter One is composed of the Background to the Study, the Statement of the Problem, Research Questions, Objectives, Hypothesis, Justification for the Selected Texts and Significance of the Study. It also includes Theoretical Framework, Methodology, the Delimitation of the Study as well as the Thesis Structure. Chapter Two reviews literature on the two texts relevant to the focus of this research. Chapter Three undertakes a preliminary analysis of the texts focusing on ways in which poetry expresses prison trauma. In this respect, the chapter elucidates the configurations of prison trauma drawing mainly on Caruth's insights on trauma. The fourth chapter explores strategies poetry places at the

disposal of traumatized people to work through or even heal trauma and the degree to which these strategies are successful.

The final chapter presents the researcher's concluding remarks on Matthews and Awoonor's texts in respect of prison trauma and the possibility of achieving closure.

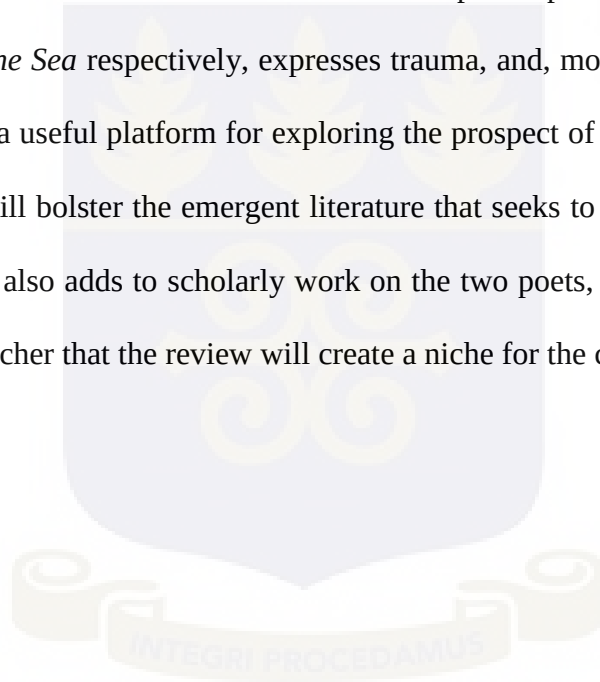


CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on James Matthews and Kofi Awoonor relevant to the focus of this research, namely, to establish the extent to which their prison poetry, *Poems from a Prison Cell* and *The House by the Sea* respectively, expresses trauma, and, more importantly, how their poetic medium provides a useful platform for exploring the prospect of confronting trauma. This theoretical perspective will bolster the emergent literature that seeks to find avenues of ensuring closure to trauma, and it also adds to scholarly work on the two poets, particularly Matthews. It is the belief of this researcher that the review will create a niche for the current study.



2.1 Review

An exploration of James Matthews' *Poems*, originally published under the title *Pass Me a Meatball*, Jones until its proscription in 1977, and Awoonor's *The House by the Sea* reveals various configurations of trauma and poetic strategies harnessed to confront it. What this researcher finds baffling considering the pedigree of the two writers is the paucity of literature on these two texts, particularly that of Matthews. It has been suggested elsewhere, in respect of Matthews, that "years of enforced isolation cut him off from his readership" (sahistory.org). Perhaps the current researcher's unsuccessful attempt to obtain a second Matthews' text after having enlisted the help of friends in South Africa, Nigeria, and the United States and riffled through the World Wide Web corroborates the observation above. Therefore, the current study will serve as scholarship on *Poems from a Prison Cell* which other critics will draw on.

It is important to examine Helize van Vuuren's cursory linkage of *Poems from a Prison Cell* to the notion of dissociation, a characteristic effect of trauma, in " "Labyrinth of loneliness": Breyten Breytenbach's prison poetry (1976-1985)" where she makes an inter-textual reference to Matthews' text in her inquiry on Breytenbach's prison poetry. She not only appropriates Reber's definition of dissociation as "an emotional disorder in which there is loss of contact with one's own personal reality, a *derealization* [sic] accompanied by feelings of strangeness and an unreality of experience [...] the experience of perceiving oneself from a distance" (qtd. in van Vuuren 43), but also employs his five-fold psychological effects of this concept, namely, illogical thinking, unreliable memory, poor attention stretch, construction of neologisms, and grammatical and syntactical retrogression of language. An important observation she makes about *Poems from a Prison Cell* is its framing within an "unremitting consciousness of time", but that is as far as she goes. Another point of van Vuuren's paper is its identification of the

psychological hangover of trauma in *Poems from a Prison Cell*. To take a case in point, she posits that:

James Matthews foregrounds the loneliness, pain and isolation of his situation (“my cell is a frost-bound place”), “entombed on the cement-grave of my cell” (1, 36). He also refers to “the nakedness of / my hidden fears”, experiences his cell as “an unattended grave” and feels “the slow / disintegration of self” (Matthews 3, 5, 15)...The self-alienation which typically results from solitary confinement is expressed: “i become frantic with desire”/ to identify myself” (45).

Nevertheless, the strength of this identification is weakened by the brevity of her engagement with Matthews’ text. Accordingly, her effort more easily passes off as a psychological study rather than a literary one because she is unable to establish the literary devices through which poetry expresses trauma. Again, van Vuuren’s article does not consider the extent to which poetry provides relief for people suffering from trauma or the extent to which it serves as a bulwark against trauma.

In the same vein, Martin Tucker, in “Kofi Awoonor’s Prison”, describes prison as portrayed in *The House by the Sea* and the larger confinement discourse as a site which mandates “madness”. He further asserts concerning Awoonor that “the impress of prison has deeply affected him and that his suffering has steeled him to renewed strengths, as well as to a vision of clearer alternatives” (24). In effect, he recognizes prison as imbued with the power to traumatize and even goes to the extent of perceiving that imprisonment seemed to have had minimal psychological impact on Awoonor; in spite of this, Tucker does not undertake a comprehensive study of *The House by the Sea* to point out why he has designated jail as a place of trauma, nor

does he do a sustained study of this text to fully explore the strategies Awoonor devises to stave off personal trauma or collective trauma.

One critic who actually gives a hint of personal suffering and cultural trauma in *The House by the Sea* is Mawuli Adjei. He remarks in his article “Trans-Atlantic Memories: The Black Diaspora in the Poetry of Anyidoho and Awoonor” that “Awoonor appropriates and juxtaposes personal history against a collective African history” (139) so that “his slave days refers to his days of incarceration, an involuntary simulation of the “slave days” of African people in Africa and Havana then and now” (ibid.). He also argues that Ussher Fort which was once a slave fort is “a perfect symbol of simulation and reconstruction of the slave experience” (ibid.) and that Awoonor altogether rejects slavery of any kind. However, he does not illustrate his assertions with textual analysis nor does he consider the slave trade as a traumatic precursor to contemporary African malaise. He also does not explore the strategies that Awoonor adopts to ease “personal suffering” and the collective trauma of his people.

For her part, Rita Yankah in *The Theme of Exile and Return in Awoonor’s Literary Works*, an unpublished long essay explores the contemporary manifestation of one of the legacies of the slave trade: exile. Yankah’s work explores the theme of exile and return, focusing on the sub-themes of “self-discovery, determination and hope running through Awoonor’s works...” (1). Precisely, she posits that exile, as represented in *The House by the Sea*, can be “voluntary”, “forced” or “cultural”. She also remarks on “restlessness, helplessness, desperation, nostalgia [sic], a sense of loneliness, and sadness” (31) as feelings that underpin Awoonor’s recollections of his experiences in exile. Another important observation Yankah makes about *The House by the Sea* is that, in spite of the overwhelming challenges, Awoonor embarks on a quest to rediscover himself and fight against the conditions that necessitate exile. Though Yankah

attempts to back her assertions with textual analysis, she is not able to delve deep into the issues she raises because of the broad scope of her study. As she notes, her study focuses on Awoonor's "poetry and two novels, namely: *This Earth, My Brother* and *Comes the Voyager At Last* (1). More relevant to the current study is the fact that she does not consider exile as a trans-generational transmission of the Middle Passage nor does she consider it as a prison of sorts.

The foregoing discussion has revealed that various scholars have studied the primary texts, *Poems from a Prison Cell* and *The House by the Sea*, from various perspectives all of which are related in part to the question of trauma and how it can be confronted. Helize van Vuuren, for example, only made an inter-textual reference to Matthews' text in her study of Breytenbach's prison works, whereas the critics on Awoonor's text study it from perspectives which are insufficient to reveal the full scope of trauma and how it can be dealt with. Obviously, no one has done a full-scale study of *Poems from a Prison Cell* and *The House by the Sea* to gauge the extent to which the personae in these texts express and confront trauma. It is the hope of this researcher that this review will serve as a strong foundation for the analysis in subsequent chapters of this study which will also be a good basis for future enquiry into these two texts.

CHAPTER THREE

TRAUMA, POETRY: EMBODYING THE UNSPEAKABLE

3.1.0 Introduction

This chapter seeks to determine the extent to which poetry expresses trauma. To this end, the thesis focuses on the reconstruction of the event (history) and its impact (memory) on the prison inmate. This draws impetus from the perception of literature in various critical circles of trauma as an unsuitable medium to express trauma (Howe 429).

3.2.0 History

As indicated earlier, the term “history” is broadly used in this thesis to refer to the location of an event in time as well as to the fact of its externality. History’s definition within the framework of this thesis follows Caruth’s observation of “the surprising literality” (5) of the traumatic reenactment which locates the event in time and outside the victim, thereby attesting to the veracity of the event while also gauging the extent to which the event has the capacity to traumatize. Situating the event in history surely renders void any attempt to understand it simply from a psychoanalytical perspective. For the purpose of this thesis, history refers to imprisonment and the mechanics it is composed of as well as the socio-political reality that occasions imprisonment, where relevant. Clearly, recall of the ideological framework of the poets’ imprisonment situates the agent of their trauma in time, though trauma itself is a timeless phenomenon.

The mechanics of imprisonment include prison architecture, its material conditions such as torture, poor food, banal routines, loss of heterosexual and familial relationships, and violence, among others, onto which are inscribed the philosophies of dispossession and deprivation; the confrontation against which mauls and smashes the prisoner's sense of humanity and psychological wholeness. Since trauma is an individual's confrontation with an unanticipated and/or horrific event that breaches his or her defense mechanism (Caruth 153), the quest to determine the extent to which poetry becomes a medium for expressing and confronting trauma must begin with the reconstruction of the event, with emphasis on the literary tropes which facilitate this process. It must also gauge the extent to which prison is capable of inflicting psychological harm on the inmate.

As this thesis recreates prison as it is represented in the primary texts, Matthews' *Poems from a Prison Cell* and Awoonor's *The House by the Sea*, with emphasis on whether prison is harmful to prisoners or not, it also draws on other texts such as Adzei's *Testament of the Season* (2013), Brutus' *Letters to Martha* (1968), and Mapanje's *Chattering Wagtails in a Mikuyu Prison* (1993) with which the primary texts form a relevant web of intertextuality.

3.2.1 Imprisonment and its Context in Matthews' *Poems from a Prison Cell*

No man-made catastrophe is created in a vacuum; it is minted within a socio-political context with a distinct ideology. Matthews' *Poems from a Prison Cell* inhabits the framework of apartheid which is driven by Afrikaner nationalism and self-preservation (Giliomee 383). These ideological thrusts of the Afrikaner are informed by threatening precedents such as The Great Trek and projected by the Boer's unflagging fundamental ideology of African inferiority drawn

from the biblical narrative of Noah condemning his son, Ham, and his progeny (Africans) to a life of perpetual slavery.

Set in motion in 1948 by the national party, apartheid privileged white initiative as the regulatory force in interracial relationships (Giliomee 374) and was given content by a string of repressive and segregatory legal instruments including the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the pass system and migratory labour, all of which discriminated against the majority blacks in particular. Coupled with atrocious acts such as rampant lynching of blacks, the Sharpeville Massacre, Cape Town and Clermont massacres as well as psychological maltreatment, the aforementioned legal instruments transformed South Africa into a metaphorical tomb.

Cumulatively, Apartheid's abusive measures engendered both individual and collective protests against the system along racial and ideological lines leading to such political and economic formations such as African National Congress (ANC), South African Congress of Trade Unions, Pan-Africanist Congress, among others. The backlash against these protests is inhuman clampdown on protesters and those whose actions are deemed subversive are incarcerated for varying lengths of time in any of the major prisons such as Pollsmoor which is designed for common-law prisoners, Valkenberg Mental Hospital for the mentally deranged, Zonderwater Prison for psychopaths, and Robben Islands for political prisoners (Filippi 631-632). Where the accused persons are tried, the trials are deracinated from every sense of justice (Coniglio 512-515). In most cases, they are detained without trial. As has been noted, the prison space is the most repressive force rallied by authority against citizens who protest against it. Nelson Mandela emphasizes this fact when he says in "Rivonia" that "Prison not only robs you of your freedom, it attempts to take away your identity" (194). Many South Africans such as Breyten Breytenbach, Dennis Brutus and Nelson Mandela who are critical of Apartheid's abusive policies are

incarcerated. Matthews also endured a stint in Victor Vester Maximum Security Prison in 1976 because of his lacerating criticism against the oppressive system. Though Matthews' experiences in *Poems from a Prison Cell* are framed in this system, he transforms his personal suffering into the universal plight of prisoners by refraining from using specific names of people and places in his collection.

Generally, imprisonment is characterized as “dying in stages” in Matthews' poem “imprisonment is dying in stages”, a veritable prelude to death, a comparison which resonates with Ioan Davies' emphasis on the metaphor of stripping away of the prisoner's humanity underlying the prison experience (159). The metaphor of dying is elucidated through reference to a series of gut-wrenching processes woven into the prison apparatus. In view of this, the persona in Matthews' poem “imprisonment is dying in stages” captures the horrendous power of prison over the inmate, and this image is aptly captured in his evocations of the various elements of imprisonment, ranging from the architecture of prison to its material and emotional conditions, through the conduit of literary tropes. Mawuli Adzei's poem “Penitentiary”, describes confinement as a machine that “...murders the spirit first / And see the body / Disintegrate...” (14-15).

One of the most conspicuous elements of imprisonment is the cell to which the inmate has been consigned as a way of isolating him from the wider public. As a primary unit for the punitive regimes of the prison apparatus, this controlled space provides a peek into the dynamics of the prison system. It is no wonder, therefore, that the dominant image associated with the cell is the grave. In the poem “thoughts flock to my mind”, an implied link is created between the cell and the grave with the former presented as just a notch lower than the latter. The persona confesses “...my heart / shuffled with impious haste / from my cell to the grave”. Under constant

onslaught from horrible thoughts, an issue this thesis will engage with in greater detail under the discussion on memory, the cell becomes the site where the persona's imagination trudges toward death. As *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines *grave*, it can denote an underground place for interring dead bodies or, in a literary sense, death. Both senses are applicable in this instance. Describing a cell as only a notch lower than the grave vests the former with tremendous ability to render inmates powerless. In "death's dew is settling upon me", the cell is elevated to the level of the grave with the two sharing one defining quality: desolation. In the estimation of the persona, "my cell will have the desolation / of an unattended grave" should he die. This is a comparison of the cell to the grave- a place for lifeless bodies. Underscoring this comparison, the persona in the poem "yellow-serried as autumn leaves" also equates the floor of the cell to a grave by appropriating the implied metaphor "cement-grave". Sealing this equivalence are the equally evocative lines:

dawn finds me
 blanket-wrapped entombed
 on the cement floor
 of my cell (26-29)

Culled from Matthews' poem "the midnight hour", these lines compare the cell once again to the grave using the implied metaphor signalled by the word "entombed". "Blanket-wrapped" evokes images from the classical burial rites or modern sites of carnage where dead bodies are enshrouded for interment. These macabre images strongly connect the persona's cell to death in resonance with Albie Sachs's description of his cell as a tomb (Sachs 99). Again, these images portray the cell as a lifeless site.

Closely associated with the imagery of the grave is the graphic image of the cell's frigidity, a fact borne out through the personification of dawn in the lines "dawn's cold fingers touch my cheeks / tells me my haven has fled" (11-12) from the poem "evening reaches out lover's arms". The coldness of dawn's "fingers" is felt by the persona in that the cell is stripped of all adornments capable of holding the cold at bay. This personification concretely captures the impact of the coldness on the persona. Of course, the perception of the cell as a frigid place has emotional and psychological dimensions. It points to lack of emotional warmth as a result of the prisoners' isolation from the outside world of human relationships, and to the harsh attitudes of most warders. The alliterative "...cracked cold cement floor of Mikuyu Prison" of Jack Mapanje's poem "The Streak-Tease at Mikuyu Prison, 25 September (1987)", renders unfaltering testament to the metaphorical and physical coldness of prison.

The searchlight also falls on one of the worst mechanics of punishment in prison: solitary confinement with torture. This austere setting within the prison space has been variously referred to as "subterranean torture chambers", "chambers", "hellholes", and "subterranean chambers" in the poem "their wailing was". Collectively, these epithets evoke an image of a place of perpetual punishment in an everlasting hellfire projected by various religious systems across the world as well as conceal the clandestine operations of the warders. Within these entrapments, the prisoners are confronted with the austerity of nature in the form of "mist", forcing the inmates under torture to "wrestle" this natural force militating against their wellbeing. That the "mist" subdues the inmates is captured by the metaphorical "tribute" of "tears" it exacts from the prisoner.

The plight of the prisoner is compounded by the insufferable pain inflicted on him by the jailors. Incessant "pain", "torture", and "punishment" are the pervasive dynamics employed by the

prison apparatus to make “docile bodies” out of the prisoners (Foucault 131-171). Jailors’ unfettered power over inmates is encapsulated in the phrase “harsh overlords”, strongly suggesting not only the jailors’ power over the prisoners but also their unconscionable disposition toward the inmates. The jailors’ position as the “controllers” of the fate of prisoners resonates with a jailor’s banal expression of power thus: “I am the regulation” (First 84). It also echoes Larson’s observation that guards “mete out punishment” to prisoners (144).

Matthews’ *Poems from a Prison Cell* does more than depict prison as a site that portrays prisoners’ helplessness against warders’ viciousness. They also depict it as an auditory hell following the physical and psychological torture inmates’ experience. None more lucidly illustrates this than Matthews’ verse “their wailing was” in which

their wailing was
a wind seeking escape
from subterranean
torture chambers (1-3)

reflects the insufferable pain prisoners are subjected to. The alliterative use of the consonant “w” in “wailing”, “was”, and “wind” captures the eerie, ghoulish mood created by the whoosh of the wind, thereby expressing a deep sense of pain and loss. The sense of peril and loss “wailing” conveys is reinforced by the urgent need for the wind to escape these chambers of punishment. If the wailing of the prisoners enduring punishment is eerie, then its modulation from “loud” to “faint echoes” is even more so. The link between the prisoners’ bodily response to the punishment and the ensuing noise is expressed by the alliterative lines “suffering punishment / withering, squirming, screaming” (11-12) in which the sibilant “s” in “suffering”, “squirming”, and “screaming” conveys a deep sense of discomfort the prisoners go through. It has been

suggested elsewhere that prisoners witnessing such discomforts are as likely to be traumatized as those enduring it (de Veaux 265). In the light of this, it is clear that the persona is also deeply affected by the ordeal of those being tormented in the subterranean chambers.

In addition to punishment and grating sound, other material conditions of imprisonment are also reconstructed to emphasize their severity and, thus, their capacity to cause trauma. One of these is the threadbare routines so typical of total institutions like prison and psychiatric hospitals in which a number of “like-situated individuals cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (Goffman xiii). The persona in the poem “boredom” aptly captures the impact of banal routines on the inmate, drawing a line of parallelism between the two. He uses the metaphorical line “a robot activated by strident bell” (11) to compare the prisoner’s total attunement to the bell to a robot’s activation only by a remote control. In view of this, it is obvious that the persona’s life is totally regulated by the prison apparatus in a way that makes him lose his ability to reason.

Another potent tool employed by the prison system is to deprive the prisoner of the right to enjoy a continuous and warm relationship with his family. The effectiveness of this element of incarceration is underscored by the earnestness with which inmates look forward to visits from the wider society particularly their family. This is succinctly captured in the poem “visiting day tremors set in the night before”. The title itself is redolent of the inmates’ yearning for human warmth which they have been deprived of for a seemingly interminable period of time. Of course, visits of this nature sometimes come with their own hiccups as it is amply demonstrated in the poem “i scan his face” where the persona’s family pays him a visit during which he endures the discomfiting thought of the adverse effect of his incarceration on his son. Accordingly, he muses “the faults i have / is it his to share?” Obviously, his encounter with them

is tinged with enormous regret for the physical breach his imprisonment has occasioned between them as well as the emotional toll it is taking on them all.

In his own right, the persona in “a warder tolls my trail” gives a different and pernicious perspective of prison routines by highlighting his plight in being made to repeatedly endure the ordeal of prison-within-a-prison whose modus operandi is to isolate the prisoner. Worked into this banality is the element of humiliation so that “a warder tolls my trail” (1) as if the persona is infected with a contagious disease such as leprosy which requires the prison authorities to protect the broader prison population from this menace. The association of the persona with a contagious disease through the instrumentality of the implied metaphor “contagious shape” vividly expresses the prison apparatus’ principle of isolating prisoners in order to produce “docile bodies” (Foucault 131-171).

3.2.2 Imprisonment and its Context in Awoonor’s *The House by the Sea*

Awoonor’s imprisonment is framed within a racially homogeneous post-colonial sociopolitical environment which showcases the post-colonial malaise of the newly formed African nations whose native leaders have simply installed themselves in the stead of their former colonial masters. Ola Rotimi describes emergent African nations as suffering from a collage of symptoms among which he includes “-psychotic tendencies in human rights violations...-a recurrent state of political delirium...a ruptured hernia of corruption” (126). Awoonor’s Ghana of the 1970 falls into this category of nations so it is not surprising that he was detained for many months on the flimsy charge of “harboring for one night and helping to escape across the border” (Tucker 22), one General Kattah who is deemed highly subversive by the Acheampong regime.

The phenomenon of detention without trial percolates through some of the poems to give the prison system in *The House by the Sea* an appropriate tyrannical, post-colonial backdrop. In the poem “Today”, the persona drops hints of this through his declaration that: “Today on the eve of Monday / to day [sic] I’ll be in court again”. The repetition of “today” does not only emphasize the day in question but also underscores the activity of the day: a court hearing after he has been detained for months. His detention is made clearer a few lines later when he refers to “my cell”, an indication that he is under detention. An indication of the political framework of the poet-persona’s imprisonment is given in “The First Circle” when he matter-of-factly says: “riding the car into town, / hemmed in between them / their guns poking me in the ribs” (30-32). This constitutes a perfect image of oppression.

Awoonor’s *The House by the Sea* does more than capture the fetid socio-political context of the poet-persona’s imprisonment. It also reenacts the mechanics of imprisonment noted earlier in this chapter.

As a whole, imprisonment is described as a psychologically devastating experience. In respect of this, the tagging of prison as “the house of Ussher” in the poem “The Wayfarer Comes Home” is an effective pun on the double insinuations of Ussher: the physical slave fort later converted into prison and all its horrid associations as well as the allusion to the equally insidious house of Ussher, setting of Edgar Alan Poe’s classic short story “The Fall of the House of Ussher”. This allusion vests prison with the disintegrative potency of the house of Ussher; a fact rendered more explicit in one of Awoonor’s untitled poems written on April 24, 1976 in which the persona bewails the impact of prison mechanics on all prisoners in the metaphorical lines:

In a prison yard they crushed
the petals of our being

against the long row of ancient walls &
a line of assorted flowers (1-4).

In the lines above, the prisoner's personality is compared to the petals of a flower that add colour and liveliness to it; much as the mangling of the petal takes away its life force so does prison squash every sense of life in the prisoner, a phenomenon conveyed by the word "crushed". In *Letters to Martha* (1968), this phenomenon is depicted in the poem "Postscript 6" as "that hammering brutal atmosphere" (7).

To buttress this depiction of confinement, Awoonor's *The House by the Sea* elucidates specific dynamics of incarceration, two of which are the twin motifs of torture and jailors' untrammelled power over prisoners which percolates through the poem "Much here the tinker said..." via a powerful metonymy, "boots applied to earthbound heads", where "boots" and "heads" refer to jailors and prisoners respectively. The significance of this metonymy lies in its ability to focus on the specific tools and objects of punishment, vividly highlighting the enormity of the brutality meted out to prisoners and underscoring the absolute power of the jailors over their charge. Given this portrait of brutality, it is not surprising that the persona in Awoonor's poem "The First Circle" calls torture chambers "cellars of oppression", a metaphor which aptly compares prison to a cellar on the basis of their location underground, suggesting the inhumanity of the happenings there, concealed from the sensitive public conscience.

One of the most expressive images of torture is provided in Awoonor's "On Being Told of Torture" where "He said he saw him lying / on the floor in his own blood / unconscious" which connects the collective gory visual image created by "lying", "floor", "blood", and "unconscious" with the cacophony of the lines to stamp the chilling reality of torture and physical pain on the bodies of the victims. Admittedly, to state that *The House by the Sea*

delineates only callous warders would be an untruth. It also sheds light on the warm-hearted warders whose tenderness thaws the ice of wickedness enveloping the prison environment. One of Awoonor's untitled poems highlights a "friendly warder" who inspires him to courage in the face of the court action against him. In the main, reminiscing the earlier portraits of jailors as sadistic, Mawuli Adzei's poem "Penitentiary" is also evocative of torture and the uninhibited authority of the warders on inmates. The persona ruefully laments:

The caretakers wear masks
 Of the lynch mob
 Terror rife in their eyes
 The hooded *felons* in chains
 Cower at their feet (1-5, italicized in the original).

The visual imagery created by "masks", "eyes", "chains", and "cower" is expressive of the tenebrous clouds of savagery hanging over the prisoners.

The notion of deprivation inhabiting the prison experience is another mechanic *The House by the Sea* recreates by offering a peek into its dynamics, particularly as it relates to family relationships. In "To Sika on Her 11th Birthday", the persona highlights the disappointment attendant on his reneging on the promise he made to his daughter before her eleventh birthday. He says "I had promised a party / ...I won't be there" because he is restrained by his cell bars and his warder. Unlike Matthews, Awoonor's persona plays down on the seriousness of the issue by infusing his verse with humour, achieved by the matter-of-fact way in which he tries to convince his daughter that he is not willfully breaking his promise and assures her of their imminent reunion. However, both texts share the impact of insidiousness of deprivation with Mapanje's poem "Fears from Mikuyu Cells for Our Loves" which introduces a different

dynamic verging on fear for the loved ones left at the mercy of a heartless political system (1-43).

Last but not least, it has been established that prison environment is defined by its gross insanitary conditions. In his article, “Repressive Dynamics and Political Subjectivities”, Miguel Cardina records Henrique Galvao as portraying prison as a place with “...a general scenario of filth” (Cardina 109). Awoonor’s *The House by the Sea* captures the generally dirty environment in prison in the poem “Much here the tinker said...” whose persona grants a glimpse of the squalid environment in which prisoners live daily. He observes: “blood on the pavement near the communal kitchen / so close to the open air latrines” (7-8). He uses the visual image of “blood” and the olfactory image of reeking “latrines” to show the imminent danger these pose to the health of the inmates especially as these health risks are close to the “communal kitchen”, thereby indicating a lack of proper sanitation in confinement.

A few lines later, the persona seals his unuttered conviction that prison environments pose serious health challenges to inmates in his observation that: “we were told to use water / as no tissues have been delivered from HQ” (12-13). A similar deplorable condition is registered in Mapange’s *Chattering Wagtails in a Mikuyu Prison* where the persona of “Scrubbing the Furious Walls of Mikuyu” contends with “these haggard cells stinking of bucket / shit and vomit and acrid urine...” (2-3) and “...blood-bloated mosquitoes” (10). Thus, Awoonor’s text represents prison as a cauldron of filth.

3.3.0 Memory

The foregoing discussion has established that imprisonment has the capacity to inflict severe psychological harm on its victims. To what extent is this possible? What are the effects of imprisonment on the inmates and how are these represented? Memory explores the impact of traumatic events on people exposed to them. On this account, it will transcend its usual consideration as a simple recollection of some fixed past to incorporate its broader definition as involving processes of selecting, forgetting, repeating and re-assembling historical impressions transmitted trans-generationally. Of course, this definition also includes the central trauma paradox of elision of the traumatic event and the traumatic reenactment of the event. The extensive scope of memory in this study makes it necessary to gauge the impact of trauma on an individual as well as a group.

3.3.1 The Individual's Encounter with Trauma in Matthews *Poems from a Prison Cell*

Individual trauma focuses on the harmful impact of a catastrophic on the consciousness of an individual. This discussion is grounded mainly on Caruth's notion of trauma but thoughts from other scholars are appropriated when it becomes necessary. Cathy Caruth conceives traumatic memory as a paradox characterized by traumatic reenactment of the event and elision of the event from memory (151-152). In tandem with trauma theory, therefore, memory is concerned with the impact of the traumatic event on the victim, focusing on the extent to which traumatic memory and its effects are framed with respect to the identity or consciousness of the victim (s). According to van der Kolk and van der Hart, "many writers about the human response to trauma have observed that a feeling of helplessness, of physical or emotional paralysis, is fundamental to

making an event traumatic...” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 175). Thus, it is only when a person exposed to a catastrophic event exhibits the aforementioned and other psychological effects that he or she can be considered to be traumatized. Since trauma is defined as the shattering of the psyche of an individual as a result of his or her confrontation with an event, it is rewarding to pose the following questions. How is this phenomenon expressed literarily? How is prison trauma configured in relation to trauma paradox? What other major psychological effects underscore underline the incarceration experience?

3.3.2 Representing the Shattered Psyche

Following Theodore Adorno’s contention that “After Aushwitz...to write poem is barbaric” (qtd. in Howe 429), many theorists have undermined the capacity of poetry to express trauma. As a result of interventions from such later theorists such as Shoshana Felman and Judith Herman, the power of poetry to reveal trauma has been reestablished. How is this phenomenon captured in *Poems from a Prison Cell*?

In Matthews’ collection, the mauling of the prisoner’s psyche and the resulting sense of helplessness is depicted in concrete details through a series of images. His heavily figurative verse “my spirit shredded as a”, among others, portrays the phenomenon of the ripping apart of his selfhood into smithereens. He laments:

my spirit
shredded as a
wind-ripped cloud
will not last out
night’s time

like a sky cleared
 i shall be
 without covering
 prey to despair gorging
 upon my being
 leaving me a hulk
 eyes turned inwards
 observing my nakedness (“my spirit shredded as a” 1-13)

Within these lines, the persona strongly mirrors the smashing effect of imprisonment on his psyche, the total dismantling of his defense mechanism and his sense of utter helplessness. The opening simile “my spirit / shredded as a / wind-ripped cloud” compares the thorough demolition of his selfhood to a cloud wrenched by a violent wind; much as a cloud lacks any defenses against a rampaging wind so also is the prisoner’s selfhood mercilessly disposed to the relentless attacks from the capricious prison system. The implied metaphor “shredded” which draws a parallel between his spirit and an object such as a piece of paper that can be torn into pieces confirms the smashing of the persona’s psyche. The thoroughness of the devastation in addition to the total incapacitation it inflicts on the victim is implied in the next lines of the poem “will not last out / night’s time” which refer clearly to the “wind-ripped cloud”.

Extending the imagery of his defenselessness, the persona compares the dismantling of his protective shield, metaphorically referred to as “shield” which is evocative of the protective armour used by soldiers in ancient times, to “a sky cleared”. The logic of this simile is obvious: a cloud protects the sky from the sun but at the same time it is amenable to the malice of the wind as the earlier portion of the poem has demonstrated; hence, the defenselessness of the persona is equivalent to a bare sky, one whose cloud has been ripped apart by the wind. The persona goes

further to detail the effect of having his “covering” removed, using the most concrete images possible. According to him, the disintegration of his shield has made him susceptible to despair; his use of an implied metaphor “prey” portrays him as bereft of any fortification like animals naturally classified as prey. The process and effect of this massive demolition of his being is conveyed using a powerful reification of despair: despair mercilessly gorges on his being without any inhibition. The outcome of this savagery is that the persona is left as “a hulk”, a ship whose fittings have been stripped and it is permanently moored thereafter. This image registers the persona’s belief in the permanence of his despair and hopelessness which makes him withdraw his gaze into his inner world to espy his internal disarray. His use of the word “nakedness” confirms his belief that his psychical protection is down since he is definitely not using this word literally but metaphorically to show his lack of any protection against the whims of the prison system.

On another note of revealing the destruction of the prisoner’s selfhood, the persona appropriates an implied metaphor, “man robbed of belief” in Matthews’ poem “hopes are aborted” to emphasize the loss of something precious. The conventional frames of reference in the persona’s pre-incarceration life are compared to a valuable thing that can be “robbed”, which is a recognition of the pricelessness of the psychical defenses. By implication, imprisonment is a thief who has plundered all the pre-conceived notions the prisoner subscribes to. The end of the old world order the prisoner subscribes to is conveyed in the crow’s cynical call “the world’s end is now”, a call which is itself an allusion to the apocalyptic end of the world various religions, particularly Christianity, prophesy. This allusion equates the prison inmate’s reality to the “world”; thus, the finality of the latter’s destruction highlights the inmate’s utter sense of loss in

the face of the seemingly irreparable damage inflicted on his personality by the harsh prison environment.

Elsewhere in Matthews' collection, the shredding of the prisoner's personality is graphically rendered as "slaughter of my being" ("i am further confined" 13) and "...his senses wither away" ("the day has died on me" 14). The first poem above uses animal imagery and specifically appropriates an implied metaphor which inheres in the word "slaughter" to compare the persona's psychological disintegration to the butchering of an animal. Such an image concretizes the destruction of the prisoner's personality as a result of his exposure to the prison apparatus. For its part, the second excerpt above drawn from the poem "the day has died on me" also uses an implied metaphor signalled by the word "wither" to draw a comparison between the senses of the persona and a plant with the logic of the comparison standing out clearly: the personality of the persona gradually whittles away as it is exposed to the disorienting prison conditions in much the same way that a plant dries up and dies. Matthews' various images of the excoriation of the prisoner's selfhood resonate with the metaphor of "the stripping away of the prisoner's humanity" (Davies 159) identified by Davies as the fundamental characteristic of prison literature.

3.3.3 On Prison and the Paradox of Trauma

It is pertinent to note that further discussion on memory in the two texts should immediately engage the two main pathologies of trauma, namely, traumatic reenactment of the event or traumatic nightmares and elision of the event from consciousness, which form the core of the paradox of trauma. While many trauma theorists affirm these two pathologies as central to

trauma, textual evidence from *Poems from a Prison Cell* overwhelmingly suggests that it is prolific in traumatic reenactment characterized by “intruding memories and unbidden repetitive images of traumatic events” (Greenberg and van der Kolk 191). The poem “prison days are blue and grey” from *Poems from a Prison Cell* provides a useful entry point into the discussion on the intrusiveness of the traumatic event which, according to many theorists, is crucial to any thinking on trauma. This poem which provides a solid canvas for affirming the aforementioned pathology has its persona’s perception of incarceration typifying prisoners’ existential response to confinement in the following caveat “your mind dwells on confinement”, a warning which is evocative of a permanent, albeit, distressing habitation the prisoner’s mind has secured for itself. With the prisoner’s mind anchored to imprisonment, reality is dispensed with as the inmate’s consciousness is radically altered. This alteration produces nightmares anchored to confinement as the following bears out:

night hours are filled with the
 shades of former inmates of my cell
 crowded around my bed whispering
 in tormented tones tales of
 the dark of their days
 of pain suffered and love lost (“night hours are filled with the” 1-6)

This excerpt vividly relates the persona’s ordeal as he is haunted by the spectre of former occupants of his cell. That he is contending with “shades” of “former inmates of my cell” is incontrovertible proof that his ordeal, a figment of his contorted imagination, is framed by the circumstances of his incarceration. In other words, the persona has been transported from reality to a hallucinatory, nightmarish state, which is an attestation to the capacity of prison to intrude on the prisoner’s consciousness, leading to the suspension of objective reality. The fright this

nightmare produces in the persona is augmented by the unpleasant sounds produced by the alliterative lines “in tormented tones tales of / the dark of their days / of pain suffered and love lost” whose concentration of the consonant sounds “t” and “d” affirms the pain and fright the persona goes through as he experiences these nightmares.

Apart from underlining the pain prisoners endure, these night terrors also underscore the loss of heterosexual and other relationships since the stories these shades relate border on “love lost”. Deprivation is a dynamic woven into the prison framework and it includes loss of heterosexual relationships so the stories of the phantoms that haunt the persona reflect the emotional conditions of imprisonment. Matthews’ nightmares compare favourably with Brutus and Bobby Sands’ experiences of hallucination in prison. Brutus recounts that while in prison he began to “get hallucinations in the cell- to the point where the paint on the walls begins to assume the shape of faces. I look at the floor...and there are faces staring at me...” (Brutus 216) and gives it poetic expression in the poem “Never on Sunday” using the imagery of a snake to register the passiveness of the hallucination. Similarly, Bobby Sands also poetically recalls his nightmarish encounters triggered by the transformation of the concrete walls of his cells into horrendous shadows near the tail end of his poem “The Crime of Castlereagh:

The shadows crept and figures lept

Across the murky beams

.....

The shadows crept and figures lept

Across the murky beams (39-40, 45-46).

Again, the motif of intrusive reenactment of the traumatic event is repeated at the latter part of Matthews’ poem “i see the diminishing of spirit” in which the persona’s voice loses its blaring

intensity because his psyche “...a strangled soul / as it sees its death repeated / in the landscape / on the faces around me”. What is striking about the previous lines is not only the metaphor of trauma as “death” but also the fact that this death is “repeated”. Using the metaphor of death enables the persona to create a picture of emotional inactivity and disorientation associated with the prison experience. This is particularly so as the reenactment takes place on several metaphorical landscapes around the persona, namely, the “faces around me”. His use of the metonymic faces instead of referring to the prisoner as a whole entity is indicative that the consternation of the inmate can easily be discerned by looking at his face. It is also implied that with all the other prisoners exuding death because their faces reenact their ordeal, the persona is deprived of the needed warmth, dragging him into realms of loneliness.

Probably, the most significant and glaring portrait of traumatic intrusiveness is given in the latter portion of the poem “i found my wash-bowl” in *Poems from a Prison Cell*. In appreciating a token of goodwill extended to the persona by an unknown person whom he assumes to be a prisoner, the persona presupposes that the Good Samaritan shares his fears of finding out one day that:

...the sombreness
of one's cell had taken
possession of our mind
burying beauty with our thoughts (“i found my wash-bowl” 10-13).

In the lines above, though the “cell” stands for the restrictive physical space allocated to the prisoner, in this context, it is also a metonymic reference to the entire prison network. Appropriately, the cell has the capacity to take “possession”, to claim ownership and inhabit the mind of the persona, so to speak. Personifying the cell as having the ability to possess an entity

solidifies the threat of the prison environment intruding on the consciousness of the inmate. This threat is made forceful by the word “sombreness” which implies that a bleak atmosphere pervades prison. Trauma theory has noted the massive malice in the reenactment of the event since it is relived with the accompaniment of all the original frightful emotions. This is expressed in the poem through the alliterative line “burying beauty with our thoughts” which appropriates the unsettling image of interment. In other words, the original circumstances of the event have displaced all the good thoughts the persona would have had under normal circumstances.

3.3.4 Other Major Psychological Effects of Imprisonment

The paradox of trauma is by no means the only way to engage prison trauma. As many critics including Mika'il De Veaux have noted, imprisonment is underlined by a number of psychological effects such as loneliness, mental deterioration, unstructured time, and suicidal urges, among others (De Veaux 259-261). It feeds into the focus of this study to explore how these and many others are revealed literarily.

3.3.5 The Icy Loneliness of Prison

One of the major effects of incarceration on the prison inmate as a direct result of his daily alienation is loneliness. This is corroborated by Nelson Mandela who frames his loneliness in the following words

I had nothing to read, nothing to write on or with, no one to talk to...I had one middle-aged African warder whom I occasionally was able to see, and one day I bribed him with

an apple to get him to talk to me...He turned away and met all my subsequent overtures in silence ("Rivonia" 195).

What follows is an epiphany of the nature of loneliness and what it does to prison inmates. Appealing to vivid images of nature and destruction, Matthews' poem "a bird's morning call" provides a strong expose of loneliness as an unsettling psychological reality occasioned by confinement. His escape into sleep has been hampered by the metallic sound of a bird in the morning. Unlike the traditional signification of night as a malevolent entity, here, it has, in the transferred epithet "night's slumber", been vested with the influence of counteracting the pernicious effects of loneliness, thus creating an apt backdrop that accentuates the effects of loneliness. Having done this, the persona turns his attention to the deleterious impact of lonesomeness by casting it in appropriate images; on that account, he employs the general imagery of prey and predator to signify the relationship between him and loneliness respectively. Precisely, he expresses this relationship as:

loneliness that will devour
my spirit as wood-gorged worms
turn trees into crumbly covering
the sap suck dry like my spirit
as loneliness seeps into me (8-12)

Loneliness' predatory onslaught on the persona's personality is compared to "wood-gorged worms" ravaging "trees" until they become "crumbly covering", a simile that is effective because it highlights the thorough, unrelenting destruction of the trees as well as the unhurried pace of the destruction; in the same vein, loneliness slowly but surely bruises the persona's psyche beyond recognition. Further, the congruity of the trees and persona's demolition is emphasized through the evocation of liquid imagery. In the same way that the trees are sucked

dry of their “sap” so is the psyche of the persona emptied of its vitality and vivacity, and the explanation for this state of affairs is ventured through another liquid imagery: loneliness “seeps” into the persona. By enlisting the implied metaphor inhering in “seeps”, the persona decisively brings to the fore the insidious nature of loneliness which, in this context, oozes into him.

To capture the full implications of the prisoner’s alienation, the poet-persona employs the imagery of coldness to show the full extent of loneliness in the prison universe. In the poem “the day has died on me”, Matthews combines the sinister image of ice and the grave to relate the effect of loneliness. The persona confides in his audience that “loneliness colder / than the grave / makes my cell / a frost-bound place” (4-7). Worked into these lines are figures of speech, namely, reification, implied metaphor and simile, which serve as the appropriate vehicles for showcasing the severity of loneliness. What the word “colder” does is to objectify loneliness so that the latter can possess the capability of becoming cold like an object. This diction proves itself appropriate by comparing loneliness to a cold object in a way that objectifies the latter and makes the threat it poses very tangible. Such coldness, symbolic of deprivation of interaction with other humans and the emotional warmth emanating from it, pervades the prison universe because of the prisoner’s isolation from human relationships of every form. To convey the full impact of lonesomeness, the persona comparatively places it on a higher pedestal “than the grave” whose inhabitants are assuredly dispossessed of any encounter with any other human beings. It emerges from this comparison that loneliness is a harsher punishment than death itself as is implied in the comparative word “colder”.

3.3.6 Temporal Disorganization

Another significant psychological effect of trauma and for that matter prison trauma is the lack of time structuring which finds expression in *Poems from a Prison Cell*. Unstructured time has been identified by van Vuuren (2009) as one of the common denominators of prison literature across the globe; more importantly, both Reber and Sillamy consider it as typical of the traumatic condition known as dissociation (Reber 188; Sillamy 217). Van Vuuren notes that Matthews' prison poetry is defined by an "unremitting consciousness of time" (46). One of Matthews' poems "yellow-serried as autumn leaves" elucidates this phenomenon thus:

yellow-serried as autumn leaves
 my spirit turns brittle
 as day fades into night
 with time meaningless
 as a faceless clock
 i feel the slow
 disintegration of self (1-7)

In the lines above, the likening of time's pointlessness to a "faceless clock" is an apt simile because the face of a clock imbues it with value and enables time to be reckoned to give meaning to existence; hence, the total defacing of a clock renders it useless. This simile underscores the meaninglessness of time the prisoner encounters in confinement, and this phenomenon is expressed by Nelson Mandela as "every hour seemed like a year" ("Rivonia" 195). Clearly, the references to "autumn", "day", "night", and "time" suggest the persona's engagement with time. For the persona, the day "fades" into night and his psyche is yellow-serried as autumn leaves", which connotes a lack of vitality associated with the movement of time, specifically, the changeover from day to night, testifying to the harmful effect of unstructured time on the

persona. This argument is made more forceful by the “slow disintegration of self”, the gradual butchering of the persona’s self which he experiences. The metaphorical “disintegration of self” in which the self is compared to a concrete thing that can actually be broken into pieces and destroyed occurs at a “slow” pace. The concreteness of his disintegration adds a large dose of reality to the persona’s psychological misalignment.

Furthermore, the negative impact of the persona’s reckoning with time is captured in Matthews’ verse “imprisonment is dying in stages” where the persona bemoans the fate of all prisoners:

castration of self by time inflicted
chipping minute particles from one’s heart
the empty cavern entombing dead dreams
and an accumulation of cherished hopes (5-8)

The lines above offer another glaring image of time blur occasioned by imprisonment and its ruinous impact on the prisoners’ sense of self. This effect is implicitly compared to the emasculation of an animal, an apt image because the notions of enfeeblement and powerlessness inhere in the diction “castration”. Therefore, the idea of time performing an enfeebling ritual on the prisoner’s psyche solidly expresses time’s destructiveness within the prison context.

Not only does time geld the selfhood of the prisoner, but it also vitiates the usefulness of the heart as a receptacle of meaningful things. This process is highlighted through a deducible comparison of the prisoner’s heart to a boulder or a plank of wood which can be gradually wrecked by having “particles” chipped from them. It is noteworthy that the particles are chipped and not broken off in large chunks, further underscoring the fact that time is crucial and complicit in the shattering of the persona’s self. Breaking of the heart’s particles registers as loss

of the prisoner's sense of purpose. Once time has chipped particles from the prisoner's heart, the latter becomes an "empty cavern", a hulk of extinguished dreams. Indeed, comparing the heart to an empty cavern is a recognition of the lifelessness and hopelessness that inhabits the prison space.

It is also obvious that "entombing dead dreams" evokes the ancient ritual of interring dead bodies in caves, creating the spectre-like atmosphere pervading the prison space. This lifeless atmosphere is buttressed by the cacophonic and alliterative line "the empty cavern entombing dead dreams". In *Letters to Martha*, Brutus registers temporal disorganization as "...greyness of isolated time" ("Letters to Martha 5" 1) with "greyness" smacking of purposelessness and "isolated" expressing the uprooting of time experienced by prisoners from reality.

Matthews goes beyond highlighting the impact of time on the inmate to delineating its modus operandi. His poem, "evening reaches out lover's arms" portrays the major factor of time's fuzziness: boredom. Emphasizing this effect, the persona confesses "i sit through long day's time / impatiently waiting / evening's welcoming arms" (13-15). Doubtlessly, the persona's reference to time as "long" is indicative of the lack of meaningful activities which give structure to time, a mechanic designed into the incarceration experience. Consequently, the persona's only available option is to wait "impatiently", a word that suggests how slow and painful waiting is to the inmate as he awaits "evening's welcoming arms". The personification of evening as possessing arms that welcome the persona imbues it with warmth in sharp contrast to day time's excruciating dawdle.

As a testament to time's vagueness within the prison site, Matthews calls forth another image of this phenomenon in his poem "wound up like cuckoo clocks" in which he elucidates the insufferable and interminable marking of time by the persona and other inmates. He wails:

wound up like cuckoo clocks
we sit awaiting the hour
bring a moment's respite

seated watching time's pace
in the passage of the
shadows on the line
inching slowly to our side

.....

for us the clock has stopped (1-7, 10)

The simile in the first line "wound up like cuckoo clocks" likens the prisoners' interminable wait for a moment's relief to "cuckoo clocks" which mark time continually. Thus, it emphasizes the prisoners' intense awareness of the passage of time in the absence of any engaging and rewarding activities. Confronted with this situation, the personae are impelled to endure the disorienting experience of watching the snail pace of time, which according to Brutus "shafts down into the echoing mind" ("Letters to Martha 5" 2), reflected in the passage of the "shadows" of the line as they inch ever slowly to the prisoners' side. The sense of hopeless finality that their ordeal imposes on them is expressed in the metonymic lines "for us the clock has stopped" where the clock, a device associated with time, has lost its power to tell time with the implication that time, as the prisoners encounter it, has spiraled out of control and cascaded over the edge of reality and reason.

Possibly, the greatest imagery of time's leaden effect on inmates is provided in Matthews' poem "boredom" that opens with a powerful simile:

boredom
like quicksand
sucking one into
a bottomless pit
inertia dulling the senses and
deadly to thoughts awakening in the mind (1-6)

This comparison between boredom and quicksand affords the persona the most vivid image of the inescapable reality of tedium because no one who falls squarely into quicksand is able to extricate himself from its clutches; thus, as quicksand mercilessly sucks its victim in so also does prison ennui suck the inmates psyche into a "bottomless pit", an allusion to the biblical subterranean space where demons are securely imprisoned. This allusion conveys the double sense of the severity of and inescapability from boredom. The dreary side of this phenomenon is also depicted through another image conveyed in the line "inertia dulling the senses and / deadly to thoughts awakening in mind". Inertia posits that matter remains unmovable unless acted upon by an external force; hence, drawing a parallel between inertia and boredom emphasizes the painful lack of activity. Its two-pronged threats of "dulling the senses" and being "deadly to thoughts" are aptly carried in the cacophony produced by "dulling", "the", "deadly", and "thoughts".

3.3.7 Spectre of Contorted Thoughts

The incarceration experience is framed by the uncontrollable and contorted thoughts that assail the prison inmate. With trauma's capacity to overwhelm the inmate's defenses, it is only a slight stretch of the imagination to assert that the inmate loses control of his thoughts. In Matthews' poem "i am further confined", the persona files a revelation about this circumstance thus "and thoughts slink away / like an honest man trapped / in a despicable act" (7-9). Here, both diction and figurative language prove effective in conveying the persona's condition; to "slink" is to glide with stealth and it suggests that the persona's thoughts are uncontrollable. This notion is bolstered by a simile comparing the unrestrained thoughts to an "honest man trapped / in a despicable act". The forte of this simile lies in its power to lucidly draw the similarity between the flighty thoughts of the prison inmate and the equally erratic reaction of an honest man trapped in a reprehensible act; specifically, just as a one-time lawbreaker would desire to slip away unnoticed for fear of censure or shame, so are these thoughts predisposed to fickleness.

These trauma-induced thoughts are not only uncontrollable but also possess a haunting presence. To take a case in point, a prisoner's thought are expressed through the metaphor "thoughts are phantoms / hovering around my wake" ("greyness infiltrates my being" 3-4) which places the insidious, spectre-like power of ghosts in these errant thoughts. Actually, the persona in the poem under discussion links the thought's malevolence to the break of day when the prisoner is supposed to be actively involved in significant activities but, by virtue of prison dynamics, he is left idle, creating a leeway for these impressions to torment him.

Matthews' *Poems from a Prison Cell* accentuates the phenomenon of contorted thoughts by employing evocative morbid imagery. This is distinctly true of his poem "thoughts flock to my

mind". The opening line, "thoughts flock to my mind", with its implied metaphor "flock" establishes the idea that both the persona's thoughts and birds are many. With their number established, these thoughts are personified as "uninvited mourners" wailing at his death. Describing them as such points to their nuisance and ubiquity in the persona's mind and also tacitly equates trauma to death as it is suggested that the consciousness of the persona is dead, a consideration which gives much vividness to the thought processes of prison inmates.

However, these thoughts are not the ordinary sympathetic mourners "keening" at their friend's demise. Their mourning is tinged with the diabolical motive of "dagging condemnations" at the corpse. According to Wikipedia.com, dagging refers to the act of having sexual intercourse or dancing in a violent way so it is not difficult to perceive the relevance of this implied metaphor in this context, to wit, violence inheres in the manner in which both the dance or sexual intercourse and the condemnations are conducted. As these accusatory impressions mercilessly hurl themselves at the prisoner, all "exhortations" are stifled. The persona uses the metaphor of "sweeping away" to capture the sense of the untrammelled prison thoughts superseding every inspiring impression that might have helped the inmate endure imprisonment.

The malice of these mental wraiths is heightened with their personification as speaking "sharp words" that "screw the coffins". Contextually, "sharp" connotes pain, "screw" connotes helplessness since to screw something is to rivet it to a spot, and "coffin" is associated with loss of vitality. The imagery of helplessness, pain, and death these words carry vivifies the personification of prison impressions well enough to enable them avert any form of struggle coming from the inmate, and the severity of this imposition is conveyed by the harsh voiceless plosive sound "p" in the alliterative "prevent further protestations". Thus, effectively silenced, the inmate is impelled to succumb to the onslaught he is experiencing, and his attackers draw his

thoughts toward death as “they shuffled with impious haste / from the cell to the grave” (10-11). The speed with which the personified thoughts shuttle between the “cell” and the “grave” suggests that suicidal urges compulsively appeal to the persona with rapidity.

As a further illumination on the persona’s condition, the vagueness of his mental circumstance is expressed in concrete terms as “thoughts hurry into the mist / to spread the news that / i never was from the start” (12-14). The persona’s productive combination of personification of his thoughts and diction prove rewarding in creating a vivid image of lack of identity since he “never was from the start” in addition to the fact that these mental wraiths are running amok in the prisoner’s mental life.

Matthews’ poem “night brings on” is an effective expose on the fragmented thoughts that torment the prisoner at night. Its first two lines, “night brings on / torn twisted thoughts”, performs the two-prong function of establishing the temporal setting of the poem and making night assume the normative symbolism of malevolence. As is manifest in the first line, night is depicted as the harbinger of anguish because it “brings on” nightmare-inducing thoughts, a symbolism magnified by the metaphorical rendering of these thoughts as ‘torn twisted’. These epithets underline the implied comparison of these thoughts to objects or entities such as paper and wood that can be ripped apart or distorted. The solidity emanating from these descriptions portray the unwholesomeness of these impressions.

Thereon, the poem turns its attention toward the profile of the persona’s nocturnal attackers he is confronted with, carefully noting that they are “the stealthy swish / of rubber heels” (4-5). The persona’s use of two implied metaphors, “stealthy swish” which compares the swiftness of these thoughts to the sound made by air as an entity moves swiftly through it and “rubber heels” that

draws a comparison between the tenacity of the persona's nightly tormentors to the durability of a footwear with rubber heels, enlarges the capacity of these thoughts to launch a blistering attack on the persona. The speed of these thoughts is strengthened by the sibilance in "stealthy swish" since it is suggestive of the swoosh sound of a fast moving object. Thus equipped, these marauding invaders of the persona's sanity are profiled as "intruders" on dreams that dramatize soothing events from the persona's childhood. Personifying them as interlopers is a clear manifestation that they have foisted themselves on the persona's psyche because his defenses are broken down.

Following this intrusion, the persona's dreams become disjointed nightmarish scenes, a sense carried through the visual imagery that "shattered", "freak", "scenes" capture in addition to the cacophony that the harsh alveolar plosive "t" makes in the lines "transforming it into / shattered freak scenes" (8-9). The "phantasmagorical figures" populating these freak scenes are "riotous" as they torment the persona. It is realizable from "phantasmagorical" that the images plaguing the inmate could be traumatic nightmares or figures emanating from the id and points to his loss of control over his thinking because of his exposure to shattering conditions of confinement. Linking "torment" to "flesh" in the line "phantasmagorical figures riotous / in their torment / of my flesh" reveals that his unpleasant psychological circumstance has a tremendous influence on his body though it does not presently reveal any specifics.

The ensuing image of a foetus evoked in "foetus-fold i lay / fearful of night's / torn twisted thoughts" (13-15) affords a comparison between the persona and a foetus bordering on the feebleness and helplessness both exhibit. In the case of the persona, curling up like a foetus suggests he has become enervated by the constant attacks of horrifying thoughts making him recoil from them with unbridled fear. The persona's helplessness is reinforced by the repetition

of the metaphorical “torn twisted thoughts” which is dominated by the jarring voiceless alveolar plosive “t”; similarly, the uninhibited power of his fear which is emphasized by the voiceless labiodental fricative “f” in the alliterative “foetus-fold i lay / fearful of night’s” forcefully connects to the ease of this sound’s articulation.

3.3.8 The Snake of Fear

One of the most glaring psychological realities considered by De Veaux as a common denominator of prison writing and for that matter the prison experience is fear (259). In the wider trauma field, it is also considered as an important feature. None of the poems in *Poems from a Prison Cell* elucidates the mechanics of fear more than “fear, a snake” which opens with a striking metaphor:

fear, a snake
 wrapped around my throat
 makes my eyes cockroach
 at the blocking of breath (1-4)

As can be seen from the above, fear is “wrapped” around the throat of the persona to produce a crushing sensation such as that resulting from a python, for example, squeezing life out of its hapless victim as it coils round it. This metaphor evokes man’s primordial fear of snakes and is, in a way, allusive of the biblical enmity pertaining between the two as depicted in the Bible’s narrative of the fall of man and its consequences in the book of Genesis (*The New Jerusalem Bible*, Gen. 3.14-15). This allusion together with the metaphor concretizes the persona’s fear. As a matter of fact, the bodily signal of the persona’s suffocation is metaphorically rendered as his “eyes cockroach”, an image which compares the protrusion of the lidless eyes of a cockroach to

that of the persona's enlarged and almost popping eyes which occurs as a result of his exhaustion from the obstructed breath whose severity is indicated by the heavy sounding "blocking of breath". The horrifying imagery of fear is furthered in the second stanza where the effect of fear is amply demonstrated:

blood tripping veins
 rush a rapid pace
 rivers running in flood
 panic me with its flow (5-8)

Still portraying the impact of fear, this visually evocative stanza details the persona's veins standing on edge as fear causes blood to "rush a rapid pace [sic]" through them. The unusual force of the flow is hyperbolically expressed as "rivers running in flood" in which the rapid flow of blood is likened to the unrestrained and tumultuous rush of a flooded river and the ease of the flow is expressed using the "r" consonant in the alliterative "rush a rapid pace / rivers running in flood". As a result of the power of "its flow", the persona panics, setting the pace for the sickening auditory images of the final stanza:

drumbeats echoing in my heart
 pounds a savage sound
 activating limbs in frenzied dance
 deviced by fear (9-12)

As the above stanza makes clear, the persona's racing heartbeat is hyperbolically equated to the din of "drumbeats" that heavily and repeatedly hits "a savage sound" reverberating in his heart, and this intensifies his perception of the threat to his wellbeing. The harsh sibilance in "savage sounds" testifies to the unpleasantness of the noise the persona is confronted with. Accordingly, he finds that the sound is not only unsettling but that his limbs have a compulsive attachment to it as well; as a matter of fact, he expresses this fact through the metaphorical "activating limbs in

frenzied dance” that compares the compulsive movement of his limbs in response to the harsh sound to an uncontrolled dance performed by a frenzied dancer.. In the last line, “devised by fear” (12), the persona attributes the cause of his bodily movements and sensations to fear.

In fact, fear is so pervasive in the prison environment that no matter how much the inmate tries to cloak it, he still reels under its gnawing power. In Matthews’ “i walk around”, the persona confesses that he conceals his fear with “cellophane smiles” whose transparency and the apparent inability of his mates to make out the falsity of those smiles shows that prison truly shatters prisoners’ consciousness. It also bears testament to the obvious fact that it is impossible to hide fear from the perceptive observer during incarceration. This is clarified by the highly ironical lines “the nakedness of / my hidden fear” which incidentally also accommodate the personification of fear as having “nakedness”. The irony points out the futility of cloaking fear in the prison universe.

3.3.9 Deathly Presence in Prison

In whatever light it is presented, the presence of death is a looming actuality in the critical site of prison, thereby endowing the latter with a morbid atmosphere. Matthews’ verse “a sky dressed in grey overcoat” registers the psychophysiological consequences of the prisoner’s avid awareness of death. The persona notes that

a feeling of death’s approach
chills my flesh
and numbs my mind
forming a picture of desolation (6-10)

The first line of the extract above encapsulates the persona's cognizance of death in a metaphor "death's approach" which likens his increasing consciousness of dying to the approach of a man or any entity endowed with motion. The resulting visual imagery intensifies the inmates' perception of death as a defining psychological condition of prison. The persona then uses tactile images to communicate the psychological and physical ramifications of his awareness of death. By way of illustration, he makes clear that that morbid feeling "chills" his flesh, sending shivers through him. In addition to this, it "numbs" his mind, mentally incapacitating him. The personal nature of this experience is expressed by the repetition of "my". Under this condition, the prisoner is deprived of emotions that will facilitate his release from his distressing condition, which forces him to inadvertently form and become stuck with "...a picture of desolation".

In "death pitched camp in my heart", Matthews advances his perception of death's expansiveness in the prison environment by paying particular attention to the compulsiveness of that ghastly feeling and its reverberations on the inmate.

death pitched camp
in my heart
its coldness coursing veins
freezes every orifice
moulding me
into a monument
of ice
settled in loneliness (1-8)

The opening line personifies death by giving it the human ability to pitch camp or settle at a place. The visual imagery emanating from this personification establishes death as a certainty of imprisonment lodged in the persona's consciousness. With its territory firmly established in the

heart of the prisoner, death proceeds to inflict untold havoc on him as it “freezes” every orifice causing its “coldness” to run through him; this chilling tactile imagery which insinuates lack of human warmth is strengthened by the harsh auditory image of the alliterating “coldness coursing”. Thus, the feeling of death surging through the prisoner’s thoughts alienates him from human contact as expressed in the lines “moulding me / into a monument / of ice /settled in loneliness” (5-8). The pain and sense of impending doom ensuing from this macabre atmosphere is expressed in a mournful tone through the bilabial nasal “m” in the alliterating words “moulding”, “me” and “monument”. The attendant loneliness has transformed the persona into a “...a monument / of ice”, a constant reminder of loneliness being a product of ghastly thoughts in the prison domain.

The motif of death as an unavoidable reality in prison is further developed in Matthews’ poem “death dew is settling on me” chiefly through the imagery of water. In the first line of this poem, the persona establishes water imagery through a chilling metaphor “death dew is settling on me” that compares the feeling of death inhabiting the prisoner’s consciousness to falling dew, reminding one of the inevitability of both conditions for deathly feelings will haunt the prisoner as sure as the dew falls . Interestingly, dew has been pruned away from its usual association with blessing, goodness and prosperity to carry morbid connotation. After objectifying death as dew, the persona proceeds to detail its hostile impact on him. To this end, he concentrates on its ramifications on certain parts of the body using diction that emphasize water imagery. For instance, he expresses death “soaking through my skin” and, consequently, widening his “pores” and, at the same time, it is felt “permeating flesh / thinning marrow”. Being metaphorically fluid, this grim presence is portrayed as “diluting blood” and “pooling the cavities on my face”, a reference to loss of haemoglobin and the persona’s loss of weight respectively because of the

terrible material conditions he is made to endure as a prisoner. Using images associated with death, namely, “bones” and “graves”, the persona underscores his belief in his imminent death:

soon my bones will be free of meat
and a pattern of bones remain
my cell will have the desolation
of an unattended grave (7-10)

From the above, it is clear that the prisoner’s “cell” is a death-brewing site and this is revealed through the tacit equation of the “cell” to an “unattended grave”. In other words, once he dies, his cell will be just as bare and neglected as a grave without its corpse. The following excerpt from Oscar Wilde’s poem “The Ballad of Reading Gaol”, “But neither milk-white rose nor red / may bloom in prison air” (487-488), echoes the notion of the omnipresence of death in prison in vivid imagery.

Though the discussion so far has concentrated on death as an unwanted presence, the poem “greyness infiltrates my being” by Matthews portrays death as a benign alternative to the unwholesome circumstances of prison. This poem strongly expresses this death wish in figurative terms:

death stretches out
welcoming arms
to share his wedding bed
and i abandon myself
to his embrace
finding comfort in his keep (5-10)

The preceding lines underline the suicidal urge by personifying death as possessing “arms” that are “welcoming” the persona to share death’s “wedding bed” and able to give him an “embrace”.

The personification of death builds a benign visual imagery which together with words of endearment such as “welcoming”, “wedding”, “embrace”, and “comfort” depict suicide as a preferable option to the living hell of prison. In Dennis Brutus *Letters to Martha*, the persona of the poem “One wishes for death” corroborates the urge to commit suicide as a grim reality in prison when he confesses that “One wishes for death / with a kind of defiant defeatism” (1-2).

3.4.0 Encountering Trauma in Awoonor’s *The House by The Sea*

Unlike Matthews’ *Poems from a prison Cell*, Awoonor’s *The House by the Sea* is a melting pot of trauma in which the poet-persona confronts, to a lesser extent, the destabilizing effects of imprisonment and, more importantly, the multiple manifestations of cultural trauma.

3.4.1 Individual Trauma in Awoonor’s *The House by the Sea*: Representing the Shattering Psyche

Confinement has been established as a traumatizing experience by virtue of prison mechanics fuelled mainly by deprivation and alienation. Therefore, it stands to reason that the prisoner’s psyche receives hefty blows from the prison system. How is this represented in Awoonor’s text? What are the psychological effects of this battery?

In *The House by the Sea*, the demolition of a prisoner’s personality on account of his incarceration is expressed in a similarly horrendous image carried in the first stanza of his poem “In a prison yard” written on April 24, 1976:

In a prison yard they crushed

the petals of our being
 against a long row of ancient wall &
 a line of assorted flowers (1-4).

The preceding lines compare the prisoners' humanity to the "petals" of a flower which gives the flower its colour to attract bees and other living entities; therefore the crushing of the persona's psyche is tantamount to stripping a flower of its lively and attractive qualities. Similarly, the prisoners' personalities are stripped of everything that animates them. The "ancient wall" underscores the antiquity of the prison and implicitly adds a historical dimension to it.

Awoonor repeats this motif using the image of light in his poem "Love". In this poem, life is compared to a "crystal light" with its illuminating qualities obvious. Placed in the prison context, this light "dissolves"- a synaesthesia here that points to a momentary lapse of the personae into prison trauma, leading to their confusion of senses- and "shimmers" (connoting inconsistency as a result of the circumstances of their incarceration) in what is decidedly the twilight of its pre-incarceration brilliance. As a result of the dreary outlook of prisoners, prison becomes the metaphorical "brink", the edge of existence that ensures the "triumph of pain" over the prisoner.

The incessant injury inflicted on the prisoner's consciousness by the mechanics of incarceration is manifested by the unwholesome effects he or she exhibit. One of these is the motif of unstructured time which appears to be the most easily perceived effect of imprisonment in *The House by the Sea*. In his poem "Us", Awoonor provides a glaring portrait of the prisoner's engagement with time. It becomes obvious that temporal disorganization has coerced the persona and other inmates into "time keepers in the house by the sea" saddled with the heavy burden of impatiently awaiting the "dawning sounds", any sound that breaks the icy grip of boredom, and detecting "the mildest inflection" in an announcer's voice.

While prisoners are consumed with fear of physical and psychological injury to themselves, the poet-persona of “The Second Circle” experiences a different kind of terror which he succinctly expresses as “Fear, / for friends, comrades, / but never for yourself” (6-8), alliterating on the voiceless labiodental fricative “f” to show his deep-seated concern for other people experiencing the brutalities of a savage system. A similar sentiment is registered in Jack Mapange’s poem “Fears from Mikuyu Cells for Our Loves” in which the personae imagine the brutal moments that coerce their family and neighbours to deny them in various ways.

3.4.2 Collective Trauma in Awoonor’s *The House by the Sea*: Fractured Present in the Shadow of a Violent History

One significant thing about Awoonor’s *The House by the Sea* is that while it provides minimal exposure on personal clinical effects of trauma, it provokes memories of the violent history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade which serves as the traumatic precursor to the malaise of post-colonial African States. This echoes Kojo Opoku-Agyemang’s assertions that the “slave trade persists in its effects” (1) which are “the pressures of our societies today, the tributes we pay in blood- colonialism, neo-colonialism, even poverty and the lopsided world order” (9). On this note, this study reads the phenomenon of Africa’s socio-economic, cultural and political breakdown as a manifestation of trans-generational transmission of the Slave Trade. This notion of cultural trauma is hypothesized by Freud (Visser 273), and its application to an event such as the Slave Trade is challenged only by the fact that this theory sets the traumatic event in mythic time whereas the Slave Trade is a historical reality. However, Freud’s notion of transmission of the traumatic event across generations is useful to this discussion.

Awoonor's filtering of the dislocation and angst endured by underprivileged masses of the emergent African States through the lenses of prison with memories of the Slave Trade as a solid backdrop is appropriate because a welter of both artistic works and scholarship focus on the victims who were hauled across the Atlantic to a "new world", but Opoku-Agyemang notes:

...the most horrendous experience of the victim society belonged to a small group hardly ever mentioned in the literature: the damned who survived, those deprived relatives of the captured African. These included parents, brothers and sisters, uncles and other relatives and friends who knew and cared for the captive. In a way, theirs was ... a loss of deepest death" (5-6).

Opoku-Agyemang's insight does not in any way weaken the trauma of the captives themselves; rather, it helps to throw light on the impact of the slave trade on those left behind.

Awoonor's text treads Opoku-Agyemang's path noted above by reconstructing the Slave Trade and linking its vicious consequences to the present. In executing this agenda, the poet-persona makes use of his prison as a symbolic device which reaches back into time to provoke and animate the shattering memories of the Slave Trade and also connects its ramifications to the present. It is evident that the poet-persona not only "appropriates and juxtaposes personal suffering and collective history" (Adjei 389)), but he actually filters the latter through the former. In doing so, he shies away from an elaborate recall of this historical dislocation of Africans, preferring rather to reconstruct it through evocations and allusions which juxtapose his personal suffering and the cultural trauma of his people.

One of the strongest allusions to the Slave Trade comes through the poet-persona's reference to the slave fort as the following lines bear out in the first movement of the poem "The Wayfarer Comes Home" subtitled "The Promise", "Will it be enough now / that I sing you, my love / in

the slave fort of Ussher” (71-73). His reference to “slave fort” readily evokes one of the massive castles built by marauding Europeans along the shores of West Africa, which Mawuli Adjei identifies as one of the “concrete reminders of the Slave Trade...” (“The Slave Experience” 4). The symbolic value of the persona’s coupling of the fort with slavery cannot be glossed over, especially as “slave” is evocative of loss of freedom and selfhood, whereas “fort”, in this context, connotes a restraining force rather than a protecting shield, one that prevents the slave from escaping. This argument gains much cogency as a result of the pun on “Ussher”, a pun which in one sense identifies the persona’s prison as Ussher Fort, thereby locating it in history and, at the same time, evidently linking it with the Slave Trade.

Another evocation of the Slave Trade using the personal travail-collective memory device within the context of the fort-prison is provided in Awoonor’s poem “The Wayfarer Comes Home” in the subtitle “Echoes”. In spite of the discomfort of imprisonment, the persona asserts that “I wished for the sun this September day / to embrace the old slaves my comrades of this fort / whose ghosts torment my sleep” (65-67). Within these lines of defiance is packed yet another allusion to the Slave Trade via “old slaves” and “fort”. Although the reference to fort is evocative enough in view of its explanation above, “old slaves” is strikingly ambivalent. To a certain extent, “old” captures the senility of the slaves at the time they were held captive in the fort; in another respect, it registers the antiquity of their experience. Whichever of these senses holds, the combination of “old slaves” and “fort” animates the memory of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. One thing that is noticeable though is the paradoxical role these slaves play in the poet-persona’s prison experience. Reified as “comrades” and significant others by the persona, these phantoms become so much of a benign influence on the persona that he desires to “embrace” them. In contrast, these wraiths “torment” his sleep. Altogether, these contradictory

roles provide the clearest proof that the Slave Trade, long abolished, is still a powerful presence shaping contemporary reality on a personal level.

In fact, so pervasive is the memory of slavery in the prison-fort that not even the acute distress occasioned by incarceration is strong enough to blot it out. Accordingly, the persona reveals that though the inmates' personality is being crushed in confinement "but there is stillness here / which is crammed full of bits / of history executioners heroes condemned men" ("In a prison yard" 5-7). In the preceding lines, the solidity of this memory is registered through the metaphor "crammed" which compares "stillness" to a container or receptacle into which is packed different items and people including memories of an ancient dislocation of humanity and identity. This bitter memory jockeys for space with "executioners, "heroes" and "condemned men" who have inhabited these forts at different periods, which is further proof that this memory still wields considerable influence on contemporary affairs.

In the fifth movement of "The Wayfarer Comes Home", the spectacle of forced and unrewarded labour in bygone years is recalled:

On clear days, the eye
can sweep across the old plantation
maintained once by slave labour
its harvest long buried in history" (5-8).

Although the poet-persona maintains an unemotional tone, he sheds light on the dynamic of unpaid service through the connotation of the phrase "slave labour" which evidently shows that the slaves' right to earn wages so fundamental to their self-determination is stripped away.

So far, it seems the evocation of the memory of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade lacks the usual vigour, bitterness and elaborateness that characterize its artistic representation in works such as

Kwadjo Opoku-Agyemang's *Cape Coast Castle*. However, the position taken in this study, which is supported by textual evidence culled so far is that contemporary challenges faced by post-colonial African nations mimic the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Opoku-Agyemang underscores this point when he writes in his poem "Intriot" that "History does not repeat itself / It merely quotes us / When we have not been too wise" (17-19). His point is that Africa's current disorientation is caused by the inability of her people to allow the bitter lessons of the past to shed light on the present and provide useful orientation for the future. The persona in Awoonor's poem "Sea Time" also buttresses this notion by defining the wisdom that Africans lack and for which they are enduring post-colonial angst. He discerns that:

The wisdom that my father had
is not passed on. I dreamt
my grandmother mocked me
as I led a tattered procession
of women and children
to seek reprieve on a road [sic] (21-26).

The excerpt above suggests that the wisdom Africans need is the generational wisdom "passed on" from father to son, making "my father" symbolic of the generations of patriarchs who have transmitted the timeless values of the ancestors to the younger generations. The imprudence of the persona's radical break with the time-tested values of his people is made manifest in the artistic display of alliteration in the line "my grandmother mocked me" featuring the bilabial nasal "m" which connects with the word "mocked" to illustrate the utter disdain and disapproval with which the older generation perceives the cultural dislocation of the younger generation. That the new generations are disoriented because of the generational gap between them and their fathers is conveyed by the ambivalence that is most pointedly expressed in the transferred epithet

“tattered procession”. Furthermore, their disorientation is revealed by the fact that they “seek reprieve on a road”, a signal that they are suffering because they have discarded the wisdom of their fathers.

As indicated earlier, the linkage of the Slave Trade to the present in *The House by the Sea* is facilitated by the symbolic presence of the slave fort, a structure that held the slaves in the past and which doubles as an equally destabilizing force in the present. Awoonor’s poem “The First Circle” clearly identifies prison as both a medium of revelation of his nation’s problems and as one of the upsetting manifestations of tyranny in his nation:

From my cell, I see a cold
hard world.

2.

So this is the abcess that
hurts the nation-
jails, torture, blood
and hunger.

One day it will burst;
it must burst.

3.

When I heard you were taken
We speculated, those of us at large
Where you would be
In what nightmare you will star?
That night I heard the moans
Wondering whose child could now

Be lost in the cellars of oppression (3-15).

From the excerpt above, it is evident that the persona's new perception of the post-colonial world as an unfriendly and inhuman setting emanates from "my cell", a metonym of his incarceration experience in a fort-prison laden with so much historical significance. His perceptual instincts are awakened when he sees "two crows", symbolic of the impoverished and downtrodden masses of Ghana fighting over the symbolic "crumbs" that fall off the tables of the privileged leaders during no other period than the "New Year's [sic] Party" of post-independence, a time that the people have high hopes of enjoying the fruits of their labour. It can be inferred from this discomfiting circumstance that the failure of post-colonial African nations to create egalitarian societies is a testament that they are patterned after the binary model of master-slave, privileged-underprivileged relationships that pertained during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. To an extent, the re-surfacing of slavery in the modern context of African nations lends credence to Sigmund Freud's notion of "the trans-generational transmission of traumatic...scenes" (Visser 273) mentioned earlier in this chapter. Freud's concept differs from the African situation because his "scenes" are set in mythic time whereas the Slave Trade is a ghastly historical reality.

It must be stressed that prison in the modern era plays the same role of reinforcing the servitude imposed on the underprivileged and badly injuring the fabric of the society in the same way that slave-forts marked the servile and disorienting status of slaves in the past. The poem "The First Circle", quoted above, uses the powerful metaphor of "abcess [sic]" to communicate the idea of prison and other unsavoury mechanics such as torture, hunger and blood as being the elements that wreck the nation. The persona buttresses this point by depicting the consternation that seized "those of us at large" when they heard of the arrest of one of those apparently protesting against the injustice the masses are enduring. Accordingly, prison is described as a site of "nightmare"

where “moans” could be heard at night. The visual and auditory images evoked by these two words respectively attests to the unsettling impact prison has on the nation. On this score, Micere Githae Mugo reveals that through imprisonment and other instruments of terror, neocolonial dictatorships “impose silence...to close another channel for raising the consciousness of the people” (84). The channel closed by repressive regimes is none other than the use of writing to conscientize people about their plight and suggest ways to solve them.

The effect of enduring the traumatic event of slavery in their native land takes a heavy emotional toll on the people. In response to an epiphany he receives via his prison experience, the persona concedes that:

I never had known that my people
wore such sad faces, so sad
they were, on New Year’s Eve,
so very sad (33-36).

The extract above relays the concreteness of the people’s sadness through the implied metaphor “wore” that draws a connection between the people’s sadness and articles of clothing. The relevance of this comparison is that it shows that the people are experiencing heavy artificial dismay inflicted on them by their own leaders. In fact, the repetition of “sad” serves the function of underscoring the same undercurrents of discontent and sorrow running through the people because of their subjugation.

More light is shed on the master-slave dynamic and the sense of helplessness it evokes in the masses in Awoonor’s poem “Revolution” through the juxtaposition of the suffering masses and the government’s oppressive apparatus as the persona muses over the state of his nation and tries to find solutions to its looming problems. He reveals that

However is the mind bare
 The hungry people, the
 Army of beggars and
 The soldiers with shooting
 & swagger sticks” (4-8).

The people are famished with a teeming number of them reduced to begging for their sustenance as a result of the wanton deprivation imposed upon them by their heartless leaders. Compounding the plight of the masses, and standing in stark contrast to them are the soldiers wielding “shooting / & swagger sticks” and ready to shoot indiscriminately at the masses should the latter protest. The juxtaposition of these two diametrically opposed classes of humanity, at least within repressive administrations, is meant to accentuate a facet of imperialism designed to impose silence on the masses and render them helpless. Describing the guns metaphorically as “sticks” indicates the contempt the persona has for these instruments of terror.

The travail of the people is symbolically rendered by the persona of Awoonor’s poem “The Wayfarer Comes Home” in the segment subtitled “The Seed” in a way that draws a meaningful parallel between the slave labours noted earlier in this discussion and the people’s unrewarded toil. He asks, “What is this hunger of which you die / in the midst of harvests / gathered by your own hands?” (69-71) The rhetorical question encapsulates “harvests”, a symbol of wealth, progress, and freedom, earned through the assiduous work of the people yet which they are deprived of enjoying. Consequently, they succumb to hunger. Thus, it is evident that the people are caught in the toils of injustice.

Another dimension of the traumatic theme of imperialism is reflected in a segment of Awoonor’s poem “The Wayfarer Comes Home” with the caption “Echoes” where the persona throws the

searchlight on the imperialists, realizing that “Our gods are maimed / By native and foreign cudgels” (77-78). Using two metonymies, the persona portrays the two-pronged nature of tyranny that has relentlessly thrashed post-colonial African nations. Thus, “cudgels”, metonymic of imperialists who are identified as both “native” and “foreign”, clearly shows that both local leaders and foreign forces are complicit in the desolation and dismemberment of “our gods”, also metonymic of the native land together with the values, mores and obligations it forces on its people.

3.4.3 Exile: Contemporary Middle Passage and Unbounded Prison

The bleak circumstances depicted above put the people under the psychological prison of fear, helplessness, and disorientation, among others. In essence, the people endure a living death as they, on a daily basis, reel under the weight of suffocating bondage. In the subtitle “The Sun’s Mercy” of Awoonor’s poem “The Wayfarer Comes Home”, the persona describes this condition metaphorically thus: “There is death in the land / there is death in the land” (18-19). The repetition of these lines underscores the pervasive and ominous presence of “death” which is symbolic of the angst endured by the underprivileged masses. But death is also a reference to the threat to human life that the retrogressive conditions foisted on post-colonial African societies pose to anyone who opposes imperialism in any way, a threat which is particularly real for revolutionary writers. On the issue of losing one’s life, Mugo adds her voice that “...remaining at home is a risk to one’s life” (86).

The sense of betrayal felt by the oppressed masses in an environment of broken dreams and hopes is expressed by the persona of “Poems, Fall ‘73”:

My heart wounded my heart
 in this still night of my birth
 and death
 the removal man
 reaper-angel of profound destinies
 locks the door and hides the keys (18-23).

The synecdoche, “my heart” repeated in the first line of the extract above represents the native land of the persona which comprises the repressive administration and its cohorts of internal spies as well as the innocent suffering masses. It also shows the fondness he has for his native land which accentuates the betrayal he, and by extension the masses, feel on account of the physical and psychological wounds inflicted on them by their own leaders. The persona further emphasizes the loss of freedom and the lack of development of his native land through the symbolic “still night of my birth”. In a similar fashion, the persona conveys the lack of opportunities for the masses through the personification of “death” as a man who systematically removes the “profound destinies” or opportunities for self-enhancement of the people. Death, in this extract, can be considered from two levels: physical death or psychological death of the people. Both interpretations of death feeds into the notion that it represents a blocking of opportunities as it “locks the doors and hides the keys”.

Presented with no other choice, many are forced into exile, a condition which simulates the Middle Passage, as the only available option for preserving their lives and continuing their divine task of steering the struggle for the emancipation of the people. Since exile simulates the Middle Passage, a brief look at the latter’s manifestation in the *The House by the Sea* is a useful entry point into the discussion on exile which is regarded as a paradox in the sense of it being a

“liberated space” and “a prison of sorts” (Anyidoho 9). Thus, this thesis holds that exile is the contemporary Middle Passage and an unbounded prison with its own characteristic features.

In the first part of “The Wayfarer Comes Home”, the persona re-enacts the reverse crossing of the Middle Passage in these evocative lines:

In the single way journey upon the sea
My companions the flying fish
 heading towards the coast of Senegal.
We rode, we rode
taking the waves
as we trace the Middle Passage
in the smell of vomit
our light bent for home
grey in the August moon (36-44).

The allusion to the Middle Passage as the persona returns from exile is loaded with much significance especially as it evokes bitter memories of humanity, denigrated, classified as cargo and hauled in ships across the Atlantic in the most brutal of conditions. Accordingly, Anyidoho perceives it as “so severe, so utterly destructive to the psyche that most people of the African Diaspora have tended to block it out of their consciousness” (“Slave Castle” 23). The unpleasantness of the Middle Passage is conveyed via an abhorrent olfactory image, “smell of vomit”, that points to the unwholesome conditions slaves braved as they were shipped as cargo to the “new world” and the resulting impact on their identity; hence, the re-enactment of this event by the persona takes a psychological toll on him. The symbolism of “grey” and thus dim light guiding the persona back to his roots testifies to the disorienting effect of the Middle Passage.

In view of this, the Middle Passage is an appropriate backdrop for portraying the traumatic effects of exile, an event which mimics the Middle Passage in all details. Like the Passage, exile mostly but not always involves some kind of force exerted by the horrible circumstances thriving in emergent African states. *The House by the Sea* provides representations of different dimensions of the modern-day Middle passage.

The persona in “The Wayfarer Comes Home”, under the segment subtitled “One Alone: The Bird Sweeps”, brings into perspective one of the effects of exile on the native land: desolation. So moved is the persona by the heart-rending scene of the destruction of the social fibre of his native land that he mourns:

Mother, mother, my mother
the hearth is cold
the house is empty
the people are all gone (49-52)

From the above, it is evident that the poet-persona’s attention is riveted on the ravages of exile on his native land. His heart-rending exclamation “Mother, mother, my mother” gives an inkling of the bond of endearment attaching him to his native land, symbolized as “mother”. More than that, the repetition of “mother” points to the anguish that has overwhelmed the persona when he realizes that the looming problem of exile has inflicted desolation on his nation. In the subsequent lines, the persona provides reasons that explain his disenchantment. To illustrate, he notes that the “hearth”, a symbol of home and source of warmth, is “cold” because it is left untended as the conditions that give rise to exile normally rupture friendships and family relationships. Again, he observes that “the house” which symbolizes the nation is “empty” and

he attributes the problem to the absence of the people who will start and stoke the fire of love for and development of the nation.

Another perspective of exile *The House by the Sea* provides is the juxtaposition of the exile's native land and his host nation in order to properly frame the sojourner's plight, and this is exactly what the persona of "The Land Endures" does. He observes:

patterned after blood / clots
 insigniaed delivery's weeping body
 flight to places where they lock the doors
 and hide the keys (1-4);

In the last two lines of the above, the persona gives a portrait of the western nations in which the exile finds refuge. He considers the exile to have taken "flight to places where they lock the doors / and hide the keys". Since both "doors" and "keys" connote access, the locking of doors and hiding of keys is a metaphor for denial of access to the systems of the West to the exile. Although the sojourner is physically present in these nations, he is metaphorically ostracized by them. Of great importance too is the persona's emphasis on the conditions that provoke exile in the first place. As far as this is concerned, he employs the metaphor of a bleeding body to indicate the extremely harsh conditions that exist in his native country which is portrayed as possessing a "weeping body" as it oozes "blood / clots". His native nation is thus mercilessly brutalized by imperialists.

Elsewhere, the land of exile is depicted as "sooty cities of the evil animal" ("Echoes" 54-55 from "The Wayfarer Comes Home") from which those in exile are urged to flee. The striking metaphor of "sooty cities" portrays the western refuge of exiles as devoid of any opportunities to enhance their growth and therefore could be injurious to their sense of self. What is more, the

inhabitants of the west are symbolically rendered as “evil animals” to hammer home their malice.

Awoonor’s work also describes exiles and offers a peek into their quotidian routine which is underlined by a fractured identity and loneliness. Abena P. A. Busia’s recall of her experience of exile as “potentially alienating” (190) is very relevant here. *The House by the Sea* renders this phenomenon thus:

Fragmented clerks of the west
hurrying home at noon time
across lonely sonorous bays
where still rings the echoes of all
my days (Poems, FALL, ’73” 33-37).

The foregoing shows that the exiles are described as “Fragmented clerks of the west” to indicate their inability to create faith in either their native values or the western standard into which they have been plunged. Therefore, as the word “fragmented” suggests, it seems that their sense of wholeness is destroyed as they strive to satisfy the conflicting demands of these two cultures. What is ironical is that even at “noon time”, these sojourners still feel lonely as they scurry to their homes because either the bays are deserted or they are unable to connect with their hosts, the whites. This ambiguity is evident in “lonely sonorous bays”, a transferred epithet that also courts a soothing auditory image which further complicates the clerks’ lives as they struggle to negotiate between the soothing “sonorous” sounds of the West’s material abundance and the extreme loneliness that inhibits their enjoyment of this goodness. In the last two lines, the persona realizes that he has a big stake in the fate of these servile exiles because his life is defined by similar experiences.

As Micere Githae Mugo has observed, the experience of exile comes “...at a cost which is particularly heavy at the imaginative, psychological, and emotional levels” (87). The phenomenon of exile withers and breaks down its victim’s sense of wholeness and identity, leaving him disoriented; various facets of this breakdown are demonstrated in *The House by the Sea*. This is especially true of the last three lines of the poem “hot nights” where the persona hoped to regenerate “captive residuary nerves / atrophied by exile / in the magic pain and mystery of an alien sky” (18-20). His nerves, which are symbolic of the source and medium of strength for his identity and purpose, have been taken “captive” in a foreign environment that does not nurture the ancestral paths of his native land. The urgency of his situation is manifested when one realizes that the persona’s nerves are “residuary” and therefore in need of immediate regeneration, yet, it becomes “atrophied” by the peculiar circumstances of exile which do not readily nurture the native values of the persona nor does it grant him access to its systems as borne out by the apt noun phrase “mystery of an alien sky”. Consequently, he is dazed by the “magic pain” of exposure to a system he cannot understand.

The motif of disorientation occasioned by exile is further highlighted in “Poems, Fall, ‘73” whose persona filters it through the noticeable analogy of a captive bird. He wails

My bird
held captive these centuries
was released this noon
into a void. Fluttering its wings
for lack of direction and basic hesitation
it flew into the glass windows (45-50).

From the preceding lines, it seems “My bird” is symbolic of the persona’s identity and purpose, and, in the context of the large temporal frame of “these centuries”, it also signals the larger

African consciousness forced into the broader prison of socio-political, economic and cultural exile by European imperialists. Ironically, the bird (persona / Africa) is released in broad daylight into “a void”, into the shifting sands of utter confusion, a fact which smacks of malice and subterfuge on the part of his captors. This notion of confusion is buttressed by the “fluttering” of the bird’s wings which suggests “lack of direction and basic hesitation”. As a result of its disorientation, the bird (persona) flies into a “glass window” showing lack of a clear vision to deal with the basic situations in life.

Again, exile is framed by loneliness which causes the exiled person to have nostalgic feelings for his native land. Mugo elucidates this in the following words “One suddenly misses all the familiar natural scenery that had been taken for granted since childhood. The rhythms of speech and conversation to which one had been attuned since childhood painfully echo through the mind” (88). *The House by the Sea* captures it succinctly as follows:

Once a memory and a song
 now a place felt
 in the marrow
 of the absent bone (“Africa” 1-4)

The lines above reveal the loneliness and sadness that exiles feel when they think of Africa, their native land. This is made more vivid by the persona’s juxtaposition of his thoughts about Africa in the early days of his exile and his feelings about the continent as his exile is prolonged. In the early days of his exile, the persona experiences Africa as “a memory and a song” indicating less emotional attachment to the continent. Later, however, Africa becomes a place he feels “in the marrow / of the absent bone”. The absent bone is a metaphor for the exile who in this case considers himself integral to the wellbeing and stability of Africa in much the same way that bones are important to the body. His experience of Africa in the “marrow” is suggestive of the

intense nostalgic feelings he has developed for his continent in the course of his exile. This motif also runs through in Awoonor's poem "Sequences 3" which seals the persona's deep attachment to Africa when during

Some mornings the blue jays
 returned, then I knew in Kalamazoo
 the hymns end in Bremen
 on my ancestral land
 where fate seals my heart
 in an old jam jar (1-6)

It is significant that the symbolic "hymns" of the blue jays ends in Bremen and not Kalamazoo where the persona has sojourned. For the persona, Bremen is his ancestral land where the personified fate "seals my heart / in an old jam jar". What this suggests is that the persona's affections, symbolized by the word "heart", are securely fastened to his native land.

Mugo insists that the term "self-imposed" exile is not only a contradiction but a perversion of reality" because a person goes into exile when it becomes evident that "remaining at home is a risk to one's life" (86). Although Awoonor's text represents exile from this perspective, it also provides an entirely different take on this issue:

I fled to America
 in blonde pleasures
 reliving my cosmopolitan
 nay international dreams
 new, new man, my voice
 my manners
 so I lost the faculty of defecation
 with the miracle of the wild lily ("For Henoga Vinoko Akpalu", 35-43)

As is evident from the extract above, the persona's flight to America is informed by his desire to gratify his "blonde pleasures"; but more than that, it is defined by his desire to mimic "cosmopolitan", "international" and western lifestyle which he believes will transform him into a "new, new man, my voice / my manners". The artistic display of repetition and alliteration puts emphasis on his desire to meet western standards which smacks of cultural dislocation. As a result, the persona loses "...the faculty / of defecation", that is, the ability to sift between good and bad.

Another effect of exile whether cultural or political is the raw, searing racism exiles face especially in the western context. This is precisely the point Mugo makes when she remarks that when an exile finds himself "in the context of Western capitalism, which is crippled by *racism* and denigration of human dignity" (92 emphasis mine) he is confronted with stress and pain. The persona of "For Henoga Vinoko Akpalu" illustrates this with a personal anecdote:

I sailed my own ship
to Byzantium to see the youth
for elders in the reversal
A young man Hasidic to his skull-cap
eyed me nervously
mistaking me I hope for my beard
for a panther (44-50).

From the above, it is realizable that due to his cultural dislocation, the persona sails his "own ship", a clear metaphor for his uninhibited travels in search of pleasure; his search actually echoes Busia's suggestion that the experience of exile can be "...at once exciting" (190). But as the persona's experience with the young man proves, it can be equally disturbing. The young man becomes apprehensive, as the word "nervously" denotes, of the presence of a "panther" as

he seems to describe the persona. Since the panther has black fur and therefore connotes darkness, dark-skinned people and savagery, it is not a large stretch of the imagination to assume that the young man will certainly discriminate against the persona.

Racism, which this thesis holds to be a form of exile from the economic and cultural bounty of this world, assumes a Pan-African dimension in the poem “Going Somehow” whose persona juxtaposes various catastrophic events experienced by whites and blacks and the discriminatory responses that the Eurocentric world gives to these events. Particularly, he juxtaposes specific western experiences and that of the blacks under the Apartheid regime thus:

We'll quieten our tears
on the asphalt underfeet
of the negro widows
who knew nothing of Pennsylvania
and the burning of the Jews
nor the miracle of Babi Yar

.....

The flies buzz again in memory
of him who fed the buzzards of Sharpville
for whom there will be no Jewish appeal funds
nor congressional threats to cut off trade and traffic (9-14, 19-22)

From the above, it is evident that the persona foregrounds the scathing theme of racism by combining the techniques of juxtaposition and allusion. On the western front, he alludes to the unfortunate shooting of striking coal mine workers at Lattimer, Pennsylvania as well as the burning of dead bodies that included Jews at Babi Yar and the subsequent escape of some of these Jews. He juxtaposes these western events with the massacre of blacks at Sharpville under apartheid.

While all the events he has recalled are catastrophic, it is clear that western responses to these events are tinged with racism. For instance, while the police officers who shot the coal miners are, at least, put on trial, and appeals for “funds” are made for the Jews, no such initiative is taken for the “buzzards” of Sharpsville who are killed because they vehemently register their discontent against the racist tendencies they endure on a daily basis. The persona also suggests that no “congressional threats to cut off trade and traffic” are issued against the apartheid regime for that particular disaster, apart from the West’s lashing out against it. Also significant is the fact that the African American women are “widows” and “negroes”. Put together, it shows their husbands may have been lynched and they themselves are denigrated as the word “negro” suggests. It is no wonder that they are nescient of events that held the world in consternation.

3.5.0 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has explored Matthews’ *Poems from a Prison Cell* and Awoonor’s *The House by the Sea* as media of expressing trauma in prison, bringing to light various convergences and divergences between the two texts which are worth elucidating. In expressing trauma, the first step is to recreate the traumatizing event, recognized as imprisonment and its mechanics in these contexts, and its sociopolitical context with a view to establishing the tropes and motifs which frame the event as well as gauging the extent to which it traumatizes its victims.

Concerning the socio-political framework of the imprisonment, it becomes clear that Matthews’ *Poems from a Prison Cell* gives no hint of the political and social ideologies that frame it. Hence, there are references to the poet-persona’s “cell”, “bars” and other details of imprisonment

without any inkling of any specific date or names that would have frozen the event in a particular time and place. This thesis holds that the disjunction between imprisonment and its context makes the poet-persona's experiences timeless, one that other prisoners across time and space can easily identify with. On the other hand, Awoonor's *The House by the Sea* leaves traces of its ideological framework through references to the oppressive environment he finds himself. For instance, he reveals in the "The First Circle" that he has been detained without trial and has been going to court from time to time. Through his reference to his prison as the "house of Ussher" as well as "slaves", one can infer that he has been incarcerated in the Ussher Fort in Ghana.

Although *Poems from a Prison Cell* and *The House by the Sea* represent confinement as a harrowing experience with prison tagged as "dying in stages" and "the house of Ussher" respectively, the poet-persona of Matthews' text perceives it as a more horrifying personal reality and devotes more attention to its dynamics than his counterpart in Awoonor's text as indicated by the literary tropes depicting incarceration and its details in addition to the degree of focus given to it. To illustrate, in Matthews' text, the persona's cell is framed in macabre images such as "cement-grave", torture chamber as "subterranean torture chambers" and "hellholes", and prison noise as "wails" and "screaming". In contrast, in *The House by the Sea*, the persona's references to "iron bars" and "blood" in "To Sika on Her 11th Birthday" and "Much here the tinker said..." respectively are devoid of any qualifying horrendous imagery.

This results in imprisonment inflicting more serious psychological effects on Matthews' persona than on his counterpart in Awoonor's text. In respect of this, Matthews' persona experiences fear as "a snake" crushing life out of him with its deadly grip, death is depicted as dew "settling on me" and suicide as a benign presence with "welcoming arms". Furthermore, loneliness is likened to "wood-gorged worms" devouring the persona's psyche while the persona's temporal

disorganization is portrayed as “castration of self by time inflicted” and as a contention against “a faceless clock”.

The motif of unstructured time and the resultant boredom are also expressed in *The House by the Sea* where the personae are condemned as “timekeepers” saddled with the onerous burden of detecting the “mildest inflection” in an announcer’s voice. While it is true that the poet-persona experiences fear, it is anxiety for the safety of his friends and family, but not for himself. Apart from these, *The House by the Sea* does not prove to be prolific in the personal psychological effects of imprisonment; however, it is its poet-persona’s imprisonment in the erstwhile slave-fort that provokes memories of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, memories whose evocation serves as an appropriate backdrop for revealing the socio-political disenchantment of contemporary post-colonial African nations. The position of this thesis is that the modern socio-political problems of emergent African nations are trans-generational transmission of the Slave Trade. These problems include “jails, torture, blood / and hunger” and exile with all their destabilizing psychological effects including helplessness, loss of freedom and loss of identity.

This discussion on the similarities and differences between the two primary texts regarding their expression of trauma will be incomplete without focusing on how they engage the paradox of trauma. Trauma theorists posit that trauma is defined by two contradictory effects, namely, elision of the event from memory and reenactment of the event, which coexist. Textual evidence from *Poems from a Prison Cell* and *The House by the Sea* indicates that traumatic amnesia is absent from their personae’s prison experiences. Rather it is the intrusive reenactment of the event which seems to hold sway. In *Poems from a Prison Cell*, the poet-persona confesses that “your mind dwells on confinement”, indicating that he is ever-conscious of the heart-rending conditions of his imprisonment. If anything, he rather wrestles to hold the pervasiveness of the

memory of confinement at bay. In the same vein, cultural trauma in *The House by the Sea* is defined by traumatic reenactment of the Slave Trade. This is facilitated by the enduring presence of the fort-prison which serves as constant reminders of this traumatic event. The configuration of prison trauma in both texts has a bearing on the extent to which trauma can be confronted.



CHAPTER FOUR

TESTIMONY: RELIEF THROUGH POETRY

4.1.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the extent to which poetry serves as a therapeutic medium for people confronted with traumatizing events. This exploration takes into consideration William Wordsworth's insight that poetry "is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Wordsworth 651) recollected in tranquility with the exception that, in the case of traumatic situations, the recollections occur under distressing conditions. It is also premised on the notion of the "listening public" (Clingman 170) espoused by Stephen Clingman that for any type of writing to take place, there must be an audience. On the basis of the aforementioned notions, this chapter explores *Poems from a Prison Cell* and *The House by the Sea* as testimonies of the poet-personae's effort to reclaim their humanity from the clutches of an inimical prison system. To this end, Dori Laub's notion of testimony and Judith Herman's strategies for coping with trauma will prove useful. It must be indicated that the discussion will be divided into a section on personal trauma and another on cultural trauma.

4.2.0 Combating Personal Trauma: A Case of Matthews' *Poems from a Prison Cell*

Although prison is designed to inflict psychological havoc on an inmate, there are life rafts that enable him to cope with his confinement. Many of these strategies advocated by Judith Herman and Helize van Vuuren have been discussed in the Background to the Study.

4.2.1 Reconnecting with the outside

Within the framework of poetic testimony, reconnection with other people is probably the most effective strategy to counter trauma in prison since incarceration is largely defined by isolation of the prisoner. Matthews' *Poems from a Prison Cell* highlights two types of people whom the persona identifies with, outer audience consisting of people outside prison and inner audience of fellow prisoners, and this has an effect on the quality of respite he derives from associating with them. The persona of Matthews' poem "visiting day tremors set in the night before" cannot conceal his eagerness as

visiting day tremors sat in the night before
as you lay huddled unable to sleep
eyes furtively fluttering to the window
traversing the sky observing its changes
morning bells and inmates stir
like beasts anxious to be moved
exchanging surreptitious glances in passing (1-7)

This poem opens with a powerful metaphor, "tremors", that compares the persona's anxious waiting for the day of visitation to an earthquake whose force gives him insomnia, leaving his eyes to eagerly and effortlessly flit to the window as the alliteration "furtively fluttering" lucidly conveys. The tone of intense expectancy on the day of visitation is set by the simile "like beasts anxious to be moved" as the persona likens the prisoners' eagerness to see family, friends and acquaintances to animals anxiously waiting to be put out to pasture in the morning.

The first sign of the fulfilment of their wish is "a warder's appearance" and the word "impatiently" emphasizes their eagerness to have this wish accomplished. The prisoner's

euphoria as he is released to see whoever has visited him is figuratively rendered as “effortlessly you float up the stairs / to feast your eyes upon the face / of a mother, child or lover” (11-13). His swiftness to approach the visitor is hyperbolically likened to a balloon or bubble floating effortlessly; in like manner, the passion with which he rivets his gaze on the visitor and the warmth he derives from this exercise are encapsulated in the implied metaphor “feast”. It is deducible that associating with people from outside prison is for the prisoner a celebratory event from which he draws much warmth to counter the loneliness of imprisonment.

An added advantage of this occasion is that the prisoner gets to do much more than stretch his limbs. Thus, through interacting with the general public (family or friends) the prisoner is momentarily able to retreat from trauma. One interesting feature of this poem is that it addresses an audience which the persona identifies himself with. In lines 2 and 11, the persona uses “you” to indicate a broader community of prisoners of which he is a member; again, he uses the possessive “your” in line 12 for the same purpose.

The motif of this closed circle of prisoners enjoying the warmth emanating from an external person is conveyed when the persona realizes that

he communicates our sorrow
 through the string of a guitar
 it is the tender voice of a woman
 reminding us she would not forget
 that our names are among words
 of songs children sing (3-8)

In the first this stanza, the persona connects with other prisoners to experience the mixed emotions the guitarist provokes in them with his tunes. The guitarist touches on the nerve centre

of their “sorrow” or trauma, thereby causing them to reengage with it anew. Difficult as this may seem to them, it also gives them the opportunity to effectively deal with their ordeal, as the word “tender” shows, through the genial waves of a woman’s voice and the additional promise to memorialize the prisoners in children’s songs. The persona’s engagement with other prisoners seems to be a way of asserting that prison trauma as well as the consequent need for human warmth to deal with it is a universal reality.

In the second stanza, nonetheless, the persona disassociates himself from this wider group to revel in the comfort of the guitarist’s melody. He contrasts the loneliness (“coldness”) he feels in his cell with the energy (“fervour”) that issues out from the guitarist’s tune, comparing the melody to “warm rain” that calms his disquieted spirit. In the last stanza, the persona seals his affinity with the guitarist in the following words, “we are as brothers / though not from the blood / of my father / nor from my mother’s womb” (16-19). He connects with the guitarist as social, though not biological, brothers. Reconnecting with other humans through the medium of music has a favourable effect on the prisoner which the poet-persona of Dennis Brutus *Letters to Martha* (1968) describes as “Surreptitious wisps of melody / down the damp grey concrete corridors / Joy” (“Letter 12” 26-28). Earlier in this poem, he describes the lack of music as the “...deprivation / and the need / that one felt most” (“Letter 12” 7-9).

It is important to note that not all interactions or prospects of an interaction between inmates and the public provoke such enthusiasm in the former. The poem “isolated in their midst” portrays an inmate who is virtually insulated from the zest proceeding from the anticipation of a visit or the visit itself. The persona gives a detailed description of his condition with emphasis on its gloom thus:

isolated in their midst
a beacon untouched by waves
he sat with a remoteness
that was bleak

tales of visits fell on his ears
.....
his face a wasteland

untouched he sat
not part of the joyful state
of those garlanded with happiness
a blossom placed at his side
was seen to crumble and fade (1-5, 10-15)

The excerpt above repeats the idea of the inmate's alienation from human warmth and its effect on him. The first line above establishes the prisoner's alienation from the other inmates through the apt word "isolated". In the second line, the persona strengthens this perception figuratively as he compares the prisoner to "a beacon" untouched by the "waves" of affection likely to issue from bonding with other prisoners to enjoy the rare treat of interacting with the public as conveyed in line 6 in which "tales of visits fell on his ears". The repetition of "untouched" in the second and eleventh stanzas and the appropriateness of the word "remoteness" reinforce the prisoner's emotional isolation. As is expected, his isolation comes with a heavy emotional price and the persona roundly portrays it in the strongest terms possible.

From the persona's perspective, the inmate's sitting posture signals his alienation and causes him to exude despondency. In the same way, his face is portrayed via a strong metaphor, "wasteland"

which is in turn an allusion to T. S. Eliot's poem "The Wasteland", which is a literary landscape of despondency. Clearly, his countenance exhibits tell-tale signs of his despair. To exemplify the unfortunate prisoner's extreme sorrow, the persona employs a hyperbole "a blossom placed at his side / was seen to crumble and fade". While it is not scientific that a person's emotions can directly destroy a flower or any physical entity for that matter, objectifying the effect of his sorrow on a flower, a symbol of hope and love, strongly captures his inability to wrench any form of relief from associating with others, particularly those outside the walls of prison.

Outside the context of prisoners' rare interaction with the public which provides them with the platform and the impetus to relish each other's company, prisoners are alienated from each other by the consciousness of their common ordeal. As an illustration, the persona of "i see the diminishing of spirit" recounts uttering a cry of despair when his "strangled soul" "... sees its death repeated / in the landscape extended / on the faces around me". In other words, "death", a symbol of trauma and characteristic of confinement is stamped on the faces of all the other inmates; therefore, the avenue of daily hope for the prisoners is extinguished. The same idea runs through the first two lines of the poem "we live unseen from another" when the persona realizes that "we live unseen from another / each aware of the other's plight". This realization makes any healthful bonding among prisoners highly improbable.

4.2.2 Nature

One of the ways in which the prison inmate tries to wrestle some humanity from the traumatic conditions in which he finds himself is to have recourse to nature, which is identified by Don Forster as one of the psychological strategies for coping with solitary confinement (Forster 136-

137). The prisoner's recourse to nature echoes one of the fundamental features of Romanticism exemplified in Wordsworth's poetry: nature. For Wordsworth, poetry which he defines as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" ("Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" 651) recollected in tranquillity must use the natural world or rustic environment as its subject matter so that "the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature" ("Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" 650). Therefore, the prisoner taps into the regenerative power of nature to combat prison trauma. Sometimes, the inmate engages it from the perspective of spring, symbolic of rebirth, renewal, regeneration, regrowth and resurrection. The personae of Matthews poem "spring is upon us" associate with the regrowth and regeneration that spring brings to the world, paying particular attention to natural minutiae. He warmly says

spring is upon us
 grass a welcoming carpet
 sprung from receptive soil
 flowers are nipped on
 stalks swaying
 awaiting warm breezes
 to unfold and spread
 petals perfuming the air
 and delight the eye [sic] (1-9)

The first line "spring is upon us" carries a warm suggestion that, in spite of the harrowing physical and psychological realities of prison, the time for regrowth and resurrection of dead dreams has come for "us", the prison inmates. In subsequent lines, the personae proceed to detail the facets of growth that spring occasions using natural imagery. An aspect of regeneration is highlighted through an apt metaphor "grass a welcoming carpet" which compares the softness

and loveliness of grass to a carpet. What they find very inspiring is that the grass has grown from “receptive soil”, a conducive environment within which to grow. Thus, they find the grass a “welcoming” addition to nature and a source of strength and inspiration for them.

Again, the personae focus their attention on the utilitarian and pleasurable functions of flowers. They convey the prospect of growth flowers represent in the metaphorical lines “flowers are nipples on / stalks swaying” where flowers attached to the stalks of plants are compared to nipples by which babies are fed with milk to enable them grow. The pleasurableness of this scene is transmitted through the euphonic and alliterative phrase “stalks swaying” which is underpinned by the action of swaying. Thus prepared, flowers await “warm breezes”, suggestive of benign influences that motivate growth, to “unfold” and “spread” life giving petals. Here, the petals play a two-prong function of bringing about growth and giving pleasure to people. The play on the pleasurable sound in the last two lines above emphasizes these functions.

In the third natural spectacle evoked in the poem above, the personae note that “birds hop stiff-legged / pompously puffing out chests / disdainfully accepting scattered crumbs / a homage gratefully offered” (10-13). This visual imagery captures the freedom of birds as the expressions “pompously puffing out chests” and “disdainfully accepting” suggests. This sense of freedom is reinforced by the comparison of the crumbs offered to the birds to “homage”. Since only people in bondage pay homage, birds are privileged as they rather receive such exactions from the personae. Although the personae derive a lot of inspiration from attuning themselves to the sense of growth that spring offers to the world, the last two lines of the poem “as we watch them / wintered behind bars” present a stark contrast to the refreshing scenery and prospects of spring.

Unlike the spring freedom of birds, the personae endure harsh conditions and deprivation with their harrowing conditions compared to the severity of winter. Even this fleeting moment of relief is underlined by the consciousness of the personae's cell which is a grim reminder of their loss of freedom. Thus, they watch the birds from an imposed distance. In essence, imprisonment provides no enabling environment to facilitate the regeneration of the inmates' battered psyche. The personae's engagement with nature represents their effort to renegotiate space by projecting their consciousness from the severe prison environment onto the refreshing, rejuvenating prospects nature presents.

In Matthews' poem "it lays there so invitingly", the persona makes another attempt to confront the pernicious effects of imprisonment by reconnecting with nature. He employs the personification of a woman to portray the alluring beauty of a mountain:

it lays there so invitingly
 that verdant slope of
 hill
 sweetly curved like a woman's
 body
 the wind brings the perfume it
 wears
 my eyes travel its stretch of
 thigh
 my hands tingle to touch its rocks
 nipples
 its brow decorated with garlands of
 heather
 my spirit yearns for its embrace (1-14)

The first line of the above extract establishes the alluring nature of the mountain as it “lays there invitingly”. From then on, the poet artistically combines visual, olfactory, and tactile images to depict the mountain’s ravishing beauty. Using a simile, he compares the lush slope of the mountain to a woman’s body with its captivating curvature. His appeal to this pleasing visual imagery helps him to wrest some form of beauty from nature to counterbalance his ghastly experiences in prison. Then he turns his attention to the fresh smell of nature which most probably stands in stark contrast to the unbearable smell of prison. To buttress this pleasant olfactory smell, the wind and the mountain are personified with the wind bringing the “perfume” worn by the mountain. The visual imagery is again evoked as the persona’s eyes travel the part of the mountain that he considers its tantalizing “thigh”.

In what can be likened to the height of emotion, the persona’s fingers tingle with desire to touch the protruding rocks. His intense yearning to touch these parts of the rock compels him to liken them to luscious nipples. The persona’s description of the mountain in terms of a ravishing woman is a way of combating the unsavoury impact of being deprived of heterosexual relationship. Bringing in a note of triumph, the persona activates his sense of sight by personifying the mountain as having a “brow” on which is placed “garlands of / heather”. Garland alludes to the prize of woven plants and leaves given to the victors in races conducted by the ancient Greeks and Romans, and its association with the mountain portrays the latter as an imposing all-conquering entity which cannot be subjugated. For all these reasons, the persona longs to “embrace” the personified mountain. Nonetheless, he is jolted from his reverie when he “regretfully” realizes that he is impeded by his bars. Once again, his effort to impose sanity on his deplorable psychological and physical condition seems to have been weakened by the sense of his imprisonment.

In the same way, the persona of the poem “that patch of blue” reconnects with nature by associating with Oscar Wilde, an iconic prisoner who draws inspiration from gazing at the sky. In the light of the destabilizing material and psychological conditions of prison, this prisoner understands that:

that patch of blue
 to which oscar wilde [sic] clung
 is now my talisman
 seen from my cell
 that patch of blue
 precious as air
 reminder of a world
 free of prison bars (1-8)

The stanza opens with a metonymic reference to the sky as the persona uses the blueness associated with an azure sky to stand for all of it. This is an apt figure of speech because it elucidates and reinforces the notion that a clear blue sky is a symbol of hope and freedom; interestingly, the word “patch” gives the inkling that the blueness of the sky is designed, under the circumstances in which the persona finds himself, to invigorate the prisoner, just as patches cover weak points. The second line, “to which oscar wilde [sic] clung”, corroborates this thinking by alluding to Oscar Wilde who successfully deployed this strategy during his incarceration. Thus, the persona also adopts the sky as the symbol of hope, his “talisman” that enables him to cope with the stressful and draining prison life. The sky’s indispensability to the persona is communicated through a simile “precious as air”; the blue sky also stands as a constant reminder of a world without “prison bars”, a world of uninhibited freedom for humanity.

The second stanza provides solid reason for the inmate's obsession with the sky: it preserves his mind from thoughts of dejection. This reason is communicated through the objectification of the persona's mind by likening it to an object that can be fixed to a spot or hurled over a cliff, a sense that is conveyed through the words "secures" and "plunging". Then the persona shows the dire straits he will find himself in without recourse to the blue sky by comparing the miserable dejection of prison thoughts to the buoyancy of the sea. This reason renders the repetition of "that patch of blue" in lines 1, 5, and 9 very significant. It is for this reason too that the persona considers it appropriate to "offer humble praise". The humility exhibited by the persona in his offering of praise shows that he has not been able to wrench much relief from his association with the sky.

In the same way, the sky becomes a metaphor of hope and dread each day brings not just for the persona but for wider prison community across the world. The persona of "prison days are blue and grey" signals this broad application of this notion of the sky by using both the subjective and possessive forms of the second person pronoun ("your", "you") instead of the subjective form of first person pronoun "I". In the first stanza, the persona emphasizes the vicissitudes of nature knowing that "prison days are blue and grey / your yearning is for blue / but even blue days show grey" (1-3). Blue and grey, metonyms of a clear day and a cloudy one, symbolize hope and despondency respectively. Relying solely on the sky for emotional sustenance during incarceration is undermined by the inmate's observation that "but even blue days show grey".

The second stanza continues this argument by contrasting the constricting prison space and the boundless sky, noting that since the prisoner's cell is overwhelmed by despair, he is always searching for the blue sky of hope. His constant search for the sky is an attempt to project himself onto unlimited space. The word "swamped" strongly suggests the unpleasantness of the

prisoner's cell. Therefore, the sky is not always a surefire strategy for confronting trauma in prison.

Another significant expose on the therapeutic power of nature with particular reference to prisoners is found in the poem "clipped wings, i stand" whose persona perceives himself as:

clipped wings, i stand
and watch their flight
dark patterns traced on blue

limbs shackled, my spirit
soars and joins them
cavorting in the sky (1-6)

In the above excerpt, the persona juxtaposes the confinement of his body with the unbounded freedom of his spirit by identifying with birds in flight across an azure sky. Words such as "clipped" and "shackled" denote the persona's confinement in his cell; in contrast, "soars" conveys the uninhibited freedom of his spirit as he associates himself with nature. From the first stanza, the juxtaposition of his physical constraint and the freedom of his spirit is evident. Equally clear from this stanza is the fact that the birds' flight is "traced on blue", symbolizing hope. In view of the hope the birds exude, the persona identifies with them in the second stanza, when his spirit metaphorically "soars" to meet them in the sky. But in the fourth stanza, his retreat from trauma is smothered by "clanging / doors and grating keys" that fatefully reminds him of his ordeal. But it seems his "cavorting" with the birds have filled him with optimism to carry him through confinement.

It has been established in this discussion that nature is portrayed as a powerful refreshing force whose therapeutic power prisoners can tap into, and that there are instances where inmates' ability to do so can be severely limited by the restraining consciousness of their confinement. But nature itself can be malevolent when:

seagulls soaring the sky
 drunk on the blood of
 naked bodies on the shore
 their beaks scarlet smeared

 mocking the gutted bodies
 sprawled upon the shore
 victims of the sea's rage
 a feast offered by the waves
 man's flesh turned into bird feed (1-4, 8-12)

The above uses ghastly images to convey a sense of nature's malice and man's powerlessness against it. The colourful aerial display of agility by seagulls, metonymic of nature, in the first line is undermined by the gory images carried in subsequent lines. The first hint of man's helplessness against the viciousness of nature is provided through a ghastly visual image of these birds getting "drunk" on the "blood of naked bodies". The bodies gutted by these birds are identified as "victims" of the "sea's rage", the sea being a metonym of nature. In effect, sensory words such as "blood", "naked", "scarlet", "smeared", "mocking", "rage", "feast", "feed", "gutted", "sprawled" and "victims" depict the malice of nature against humanity and the latter's helplessness against the natural world's onslaught. Any attempt by the prisoner to wrench some decency from nature collapses when he is confronted with the overwhelming evidence of

nature's complicity in man's woes. On a less severe note, the motif of nature's treachery echoes in Brutus' *Letters to Martha* when the persona of the poem "Postscripts 3" realizes that the calming grace of the seagulls flight is seriously undermined by their "raucous greed and bickering / over a superflux [sic] of offal-" (4-5) as this "dug in the heart with iron-hard beak" (3).

The foregoing shows that the prisoner's efforts at wrestling against the acutely distressing physical and psychological conditions of imprisonment by becoming engrossed with nature must be braced by other strategies such as memory, fantasy, and dreams through which they can renegotiate new spaces and time.

4.2.3 Nature vrs Fantasy / Memory / Dream

Fantasy has been noted by ex-convicts and scholars alike as a powerful strategy for confronting prison trauma. As an instance, Don Forster identifies fantasy as a powerful psychological tool for counteracting solitary confinement (Forster 136-137). Matthews' poem "my fantasy transports me" provides a peek into the dimensions and effectiveness of fantasy in dealing with the psychological effects of imprisonment. The persona revels in comfort as:

my fantasy transports me
 from where i am
 to lose myself in
 sweet bird-note warbled
 the note tantalizingly aquiver
 in the still air

pursues an amorous bee
 joined in orgasm with
 willing flower petals unfurled (1-9)

Through the instrumentality of fantasy, the persona uses natural imagery to identify himself with the beauty and regeneration that the natural world is known for. In the first line, fantasy is concretized as a means of transportation as “My fantasy transports me” from his hellhole to an unbounded natural haven where the tunes of birds give the persona immeasurable aural delight that pierces the “still air” of prison. He adds a pleasing visual image of a bee fertilizing the petals of a flower to the mild notes of birds to emphasize nature’s capacity for regrowth and regeneration. Words such as “amorous”, “joined”, “orgasm”, and “unfurled” suggest the regenerative power of nature. The tactile image activated as a feeling of contentment washes over the persona as he receives “caresses” from “promiscuous breezes” bolsters the halcyon ambience saturating the persona’s daydream. He returns to the idea of regrowth and reproduction with the image of rainfall. The alliterative “coupling of clouds” as well as the words “sperm” and “loins” capture the image of reproduction. Identifying himself with this image gives him hope of being able to regenerate his mangled spirit.

Finally, escape into sleep is one of the characteristic resources used by prisoners, especially those confronted with solitary confinement, to counter the deleterious effects of imprisonment. Albie Sachs records that “Sleep is a refuge, for my anguish is during the day...” (Sachs 49). But how effective is this strategy in countering prison trauma? The poem “night invites me through dreams” explores the possibilities offered by sleep through a number of visual images. In the opening line, the temporal setting of the poem is established through the personification of night as it “invites me through dreams / to scenes long buried in mind’s time” (1-2). The

personification of night strengthens the significance of sleep to the persona. This nocturnal invitation helps the persona to recollect delightful childhood events in his life.

This recollection is buttressed by visual images that the words “scenes” and “watching” evoke. One of these is the remarkable spectacle of a supernova that dazzles the sky with its explosion. The beauty of this striking display is expressed through the soothing bilabial plosive “b” in the alliterative “burst into bright fragments” as the flames metaphorically adorn the “breast of the sky”. Also soothing is the image of silver-coloured fish swimming in a stream. The euphonic sound in the alliterative “the silvered streaks of fish / sporting in a stream” (7-8) reinforces the geniality of this scene. The final scene facilitated by fantasy is the graceful “cantering” of horses in a field where their manes softly stroke the breeze to paint an exquisite picture of natural elegance. In all, these invigorating visual images help the inmate to counteract the worrying impact of incarceration. Nonetheless, the relief sleep gives the persona is truncated by the break of day which “brings realization / of confinement behind bars” (11-12).

4.3.0 Confronting Trauma: Jail and Exile in *The House by the Sea*

Although there is evidence that the strategies used in *Poems from a Prison Cell* are also used in *The House by the Sea* to stave off the disturbing psychological effects of imprisonment, in Awoonor’s text, they are used to express the urgent need for a revolution and its concomitant rebirth and regrowth of the nation, its citizens and the wider group of oppressed people with whom they identify. The subsequent discussion is organized into three structures, namely, toward repulsing prison trauma, toward counteracting exile, and revolution: the final path to liberation and regeneration. This tripartite organization is premised on the textual assumption

that since the traumatic problems of jail and exile can only be solved through bloodletting, it is beneficial to explore the build-up to the proposed revolution. This is especially true as the persona perceives his resistance against his incarceration and moments of exile as minor expressions of the revolution.

4.3.1 Toward Confronting Prison Trauma

Confronting the psychological effects of imprisonment is an uphill task for the prisoner and the success or otherwise of this endeavour has far-reaching consequences for him. The prisoner-persona of *The House by the Sea* employs many strategies to stave off the disturbing impact of confinement which in many cases also feed into his strenuous efforts to counteract the collective trauma of his people.

Awoonor's poem "The Place" depicts the persona's personal confrontation with the disconcerting effects of incarceration. In this regard, he identifies with an audience consisting of his fellow inmates at the fort-prison as he recounts his scenic rendezvous with nature and uses this image as a weapon to counter the deleterious impact of confinement. He prompts his audience, "You", that their prison is near the sea:

And once in a while you see a gull
 rise
 swift against the blazing sun
 in dazzling colors playing
 in the shards of a noonday
 It's always so swift, so brief
 At night you recall it all
 while the door is locked (3-10).

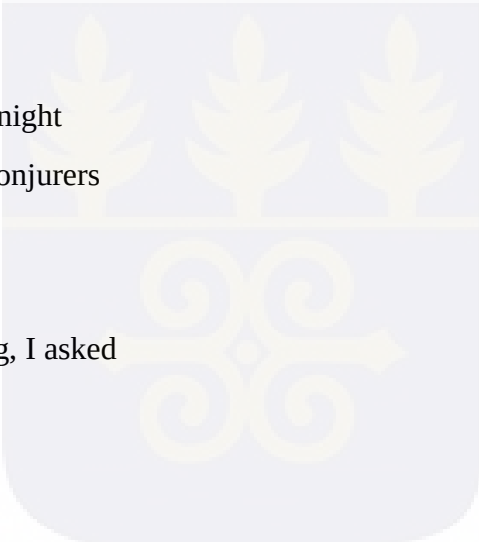
From the above, it is clear that words such as “blazing”, “dazzling”, “colors”, “noonday”, “recall” register the fact that the persona relishes these images and finds them refreshing; in contrast, “once”, “so”, “swift”, “brief” are tinged with the persona’s regret at the brevity of this natural spectacle. Unlike the persona in *Poems from a Prison Cell* who flinches from thinking of his cell, the persona in Awoonor’s poem “The Place” defiantly recalls the natural vista he has experienced earlier to stave off the unsettling effects of his immediate surroundings.

On some occasions, the persona’s fight for personal sanity in prison broadens to include collective freedom or, at least, a glimpse of the latter. In the poem “To Sika on Her 11th Birthday”, the prisoner-persona mentally reconnects with his daughter, Sika, on her eleventh birthday. This reconnection plays the three-pronged role of strengthening him, salvaging crucial family bonds, and expressing his desire for freedom of all people through the instrumentality of an apostrophe which makes his appeal more forceful. In the poem, he tries to share his ordeal with his daughter, explaining to her that “there are iron bars on my door” as a result of which he will not make it to her party. His overture constitutes a recognition of the harm his imprisonment can inflict on his relationship with his young daughter and the desire to preserve that relationship. Having that conversation with his daughter is also a strategy for thawing the ice of loneliness that defines the prison space.

What is remarkable about this poem is that it gives a fleeting view of the link between personal freedom and collective liberation of everyone under any form of oppression. In this vein, the persona dreams “...that soon, / You & I and all of us / will be free!” (12-14). The liberation he desires for his daughter is literally the freedom to have uninhibited access to her father’s love which she is currently deprived of. Hence, her freedom is clearly tied to the destruction of a system that “hurts” the nation. By the same logic, “all of us” includes prisoners and the wider

public who are pummelled by dictatorship. Thus, personal liberation dovetails into collective freedom.

Besides, escape into sleep and dreamland as a means of combating prison trauma is a defining feature of prison narratives. In the instance of *The House by the Sea*, the scope of this motif's application has been widened to interconnect prison and exile, two of the most notorious problems faced by emergent African nations. Nighttime in Cell No. 2 provides the perfect platform for examining the effectiveness of this strategy. This is evident in the poem "The Second Circle" set:



in the still hour of the night
 I dream of fliers and conjurers
 I met a flier
 in the fields
 Where are you heading, I asked
 Don't you know?
 Home (15-21).

The spectacular natural scene of this dream as depicted by the words "fliers", "flyer", and "fields" is a welcome alternative to the appalling conditions of prison. Beyond this personal relevance, "fliers" is symbolic of exiles returning home or of prisoners hopeful of their eventual release. In the same vein, the "Home" the flier is returning represents society outside prison or the one an exile returns to. Notably, this optimistic outlook on life made available by the persona's escape into sleep bridges personal and collective confrontation with trauma by linking a dream that occurs in a cell to the return of exiles. This is strong evidence that personal strategies to repulse trauma dovetail into collective efforts to do same.

The motif of personal-collective confrontation with trauma noted above is furthered in Awoonor's poem "Much here the tinker said" in which the persona projects his defiance against the prison system using natural images created through fantasy. Having noted the marked deprivation designed into the prison system in the earlier part of this poem, the persona takes recourse to nature:

Then there were four swallows
 dancing in the bluest jail sky
 I ever saw in drifts
 of swift arks
 now dark dots against
 my ache
 They vanished over the distant wall
 And my heart
 once mutinous
 under the weight of hurts
 seeks a place (21-31)

The above extract portrays an inspiring and colourful aerial display of birds which ends abruptly because a wall obstructs the persona's view. Rather than mope on account of this misfortune, the persona grows defiant. His heart, synecdochic of his entire being, is filled with defiance and insurrectionary tendencies against a system that seeks to rob him of his freedom and his being.

As is evident in the latter part of the poem, in place of the unhygienic conditions and violent atmosphere in prison, the persona visualizes a "dripping tree / on a windswept beach / on a bright April sky" (33-35) under which he takes refuge. This captures his desire for regeneration especially since he searches for "any place / of birth" (37-38). He pushes this notion of regrowth further by appropriating the imagery of a tree, noting that this tree which is symbolic of his

psyche will blossom and crumble “this wailing wall”. The alliterative “wailing wall” is a transferred epithet that expresses the discomfort of prison inmates who are constrained by prison walls. There is a sense in which the crumbling of the wall assumes a significance that transcends the freedom of individual prisoners. Jail is reckoned as an “abcess [sic] that / hurts the nation” (“The First Circle” 5-6) and as a shackling of the people’s will by tyranny; hence, “it must burst” (ibid.). Clearly, breaking down prison walls is tantamount to destroying the yoke of dictatorship. The poet-persona’s use of poetic strategies to safeguard his psyche and his continuing commitment to the ongoing struggle for emancipation from tyranny echoes Barbara Harlow’s observation that prison writing maintains the prisoner’s “sense of self and purpose” (Harlow 131).

4.3.2 Toward Counteracting Exile

Anyidoho has described “...prison and exile as two sides of the experience of oppression...” (3). Therefore, anyone who makes an effort to counteract one of them will necessarily have to deal with the other. As is clear from the previous chapter, the condition of exile can be very distressing and confronting it comes with its own peculiar challenges. How can the exile successfully counter its trauma? It seems the most obvious answer to this question is that he must literally and metaphorically return home. Awoonor’s *The House by the Sea* throws the searchlight on the extent to which the trauma of exile can be repulsed. In the fourth segment of “The Wayfarer Comes Home” subtitled “Echoes”, the persona directly addresses the exile and proffers the most obvious solution to the problem of exile: a return home with “a warrior’s gait / and dance the dance of notables” (20-21). The ancient dance is probably symbolic of the

traditional values, mores, and heroic actions that distinguished men of yore whom the exile is urged to emulate subscribed to. With the formidable task of changing the fortunes of his native land ahead, the persona urges the exile to

Come now, hurry home
follow the echo of your natal sounds
follow the call of the wren
and the evening bell cry of the pigeon dove.

Hurry on home, wayfarer
leave the sooty cities of the evil animal (50-55).

The persona speaks directly to the exile to register the urgency of the latter's return, and he reinforces his plea by employing mostly natural aural images which the exile is familiar with. The auditory "natal sounds" are symbolic of the exile's native land to which the persona is earnestly entreating him to return. Therefore, the exile's destination is specified. The other natural sounds which are those of the wren and the pigeon dove are relevant because these birds are migratory and can therefore endure the ravages of a long journey; hence, the exile's association with these birds enables him to draw strength from their fortitude. The last two lines of provide a cogent reason for the exile's return: the whites are symbolized as "evil animals" and their cities as "sooty". Since such an environment is not conducive for the exile's growth, he is entreated to go back to his native land. But as the earlier part of the poem reveals, the journey is riddled with challenges such as "the thirst / in your throat, the hunger and fire / in your belly" (16-18) in addition to fatigue. Brutus' *Letters to Martha* emphasizes the exile's return home with the line "Men will go home" (19) from the poem "Above us, only sky".

In spite of these challenges, the exile holds the unwavering view that his journey will be successful, and his triumph will dovetail into the eventual victory of the masses over tyranny.

Here, too, nature and an associative audience become the persona's conduit for expressing these sentiments. He muses:

let me touch you now
where it most hurts
in the corner of your heart
the little petals in my feet
will yield fruits
 in a season of rain
for a jubilee
let us call our comrades
home from the wars (1-9)

The above opens with the persona engaging his audience "you" in a discussion on the hurts that have accumulated within the latter. These hurts are lodged in the "heart", a synecdoche of the persona's audience. Then he turns his attention to his journey back home, expressing optimism in its success. He articulates his hopefulness using the floral image of a "petal" in his feet and the symbolism of fruits. These are apt images in that petals attract pollinators to a flower helping it to blossom and bear fruits. Thus, affirming that there are fruit-yielding petals in his feet is a symbolic way of stating that his journey will definitely have a favourable outcome. It is fascinating that the persona talks about "my feet", but the ensuing celebration is partaken by "us" and "our comrades". In effect, this means that his success is a microcosm of and dovetails into the broader success of his people.

As a response to the trauma of exile, the exile will have to retrace his steps back to his motherland, a journey which can only be undertaken when the exile's affection for his motherland is roused by the grandeur of the latter and the desire to unfetter her from the chains

of tyranny. On that score, the persona of “Echoes” the fourth segment of the poem “The Wayfarer Comes Home” employs halcyon visual images to earnestly persuade the exile that:

The land your lover
 waits for you
 its valleys greeny [sic] in September
 its mountains blue beyond heaven
 She waits trailing her marriage gown
 white, her headgear indigo
 her necklace of precious beads
 in a circlet of red.
 She stands out there
 on the outskirts of a native village
 crying softly for joy (22-32)

The land has been personified as a resplendently dressed woman awaiting her lover. The first line establishes the bond of love that should exist between the exile and his native land. Then he employs the spectacular natural images of “greeny [sic]” valleys and “blue” mountains to register the land’s allure. To ensure that the land’s charm makes a lasting impression on the exile, the persona switches to humanizing it as a luscious lover with a trailing white “marriage gown”, indigo “headgear”, and a “necklace of precious beads” shedding tears of joy as she awaits the imminent return of a long lost lover. All this is meant to impress the love of the exile’s native land upon him. It is through this love that the exile is able to align himself with the mores and values of his native land that are so essential to forming the requisite frame of mind for the task ahead of the exile. He couches this process in natural imagery in “One Alone: The Bird Sweeps”, the fifth movement of the poem “The Wayfarer Comes Home”:

But I raise up now

the dying animal of love.
 The sun proclaims me a claimant
 to an ancient stool
 releases me from all foreign vows.
 The wind the sea and the forest stress
 the proclamation of the rain
 and the light enunciates
 the inexorable tenderness (53-61)

Love is reified as a “dying animal” that needs to be resuscitated and the persona is thus minded. Then the sun is humanized as declaring the exile a claimant to the ancestral paths of his motherland, an act which revives and reorients the exile’s mind towards his people since he is now inclined to “shed all foreign vows”. Other natural phenomenon such as the wind, the sea, and the forest confirm the “rain” or blessings emanating from the values of his people. More importantly, light proclaims the inexorable love that the persona has acquired for his people as he repudiates his allegiance to foreign cultures. By appropriating natural imagery, the persona reveals that the exile’s love for his people is a natural phenomenon that cannot be overturned by any other force.

The prospects of renewal and rebirth of the exile emanating from his rediscovery of his love for his motherland is expressed in the first segment of Awoonor’s poem “The Wayfarer Comes Home” sub-titled “The Promise” where the persona declares:

I love I love I love,
 not the wispy geranium or the lily
 but the curvature of your arms
 the fragrance of your armpit after the rain
 where the seed our son hides

waiting to be born.

I too have come home to be born
in the wake of the seed (28-35).

The repetition of “I love” in the first line reaffirms the persona’s enduring affection for his people. In the following lines, he defines the focus of his love rejecting the floral images of a “wispy geranium” and a “lily”, two colourful flowers that contextually refer to any residue of pleasantness in the motherland. Rather by personifying his homeland, he indicates that he loves “the curvature of your arms” and the “fragrance of your armpit”, which are probably referring to the toil of the people and eventual cleansing of the system respectively. After the system has been sanitized, freedom and development, symbolized as “the seed”, will naturally occur. It is in this hope that the persona also envisages his regeneration.

The foregoing seems to suggest that the exile’s return home will be heralded by positive conditions at home. Nevertheless, as he realizes on his return, his people are still reeling under the weight of tyranny and its various manifestations. To exemplify, the persona of the poem “hot nights” returns home only to be caught in the clutches of one of the severest demonstrations of dictatorships: jail. He laments:

As now in age we anticipate
life, here, on this shore
in this shore house
now home at home
where my heart dreamed to grow
Captive residuary nerves
atrophied by exile (13-19)

The above subtly expresses the irony of physical return from exile. Evidently, his hope is to “grow”, develop his personality as he repairs his old links with the ancestral paths on his return home; however, the word “dreamed” indicates that this hope is disappointed because he ends up being imprisoned in a “shore house”, established earlier in this discussion as Ussher Fort, which becomes his new home. This is emphasized by the repetition of “shore”.

4.3.3 Revolution: The Final Path to Liberation and Regeneration

The foregoing discussions on ways of counteracting the unsettling effects of prison and exile strongly suggest that these two problems emanate from oppression, a fact which resonates with Kofi Anyidoho’s insight on prison and exile in his “Introduction” to *The Word Behind Bars and The Paradox of Exile* when he describes them as “...two sides of the experience of oppression..., considering that intellectuals and creative artists who insist on fighting oppression often end up in prison, that those who manage to survive prison often end up in exile” (Anyidoho 3). Therefore, effectively confronting one inevitably involves confronting the other.

Preparatory to the revolution and as a means of coping with prison and exile, the poet-persona adopts a defiant attitude toward these problems and their perpetrators. He registers his open resistance against the system by choosing words that capture offensive natural human habits and attitudes such as unregulated vomiting and belching. For instance, in fighting against the condition of exile, he talks about “...vomiting / the green streaks of my unrest” (5-6) and dares an unidentified audience to “vomit Blood [sic]” (61) in exchange for a song in the poems “Going Somehow” and “For Henoga Vinoko Akpalu” respectively. Similarly, as he eats a smuggled egg and “afterwards belched” (“Sea Time” 3-4), the poet-persona reveals his utter disdain for the

prison system that has deprived him of his physical freedom. This strategy helps him to endure exile and imprisonment in addition to preparing him very well for the uprising.

The House by the Sea reveals the persona's flaming hope in the final liberation of his people from dictatorship and its dire effects- jails, torture, blood, hunger, and *exile* (addition mine)- in the prophetic lines from the poem "The First Circle", "One day it will burst; it must burst" (9-10). The repetition of "burst" and the use of the obligatory "must" powerfully underscore the persona's hope in the destruction of tyranny. Concerning the mechanism for subverting the traumatizing system of the reign of terror, the persona of the fifth movement of the poem "The Wayfarer Comes Home" entitled "One Alone: The Bird Sweeps" provides a glimpse of

this dreary half life is over
 our dream will be born at noon.
 The night is for plots and strategems.
 We shall harness the flames for the revolt
 pride shall lead us into armouries
 We shall stalk the evil animal

 I will have no trophies to show
 For the swamp beneath the hills
 shall receive the evil animal (75-80, 104-106).

The foregoing paints a picture of the utter destruction the persona (e) and his cohorts have planned against the citadel of tyranny. The first line provides the insistent reason for this revolution through the instrumentality of a metaphor which compares the people's current unease to the short time taken for the radioactivity of an isotope to fall to half its value. In other words, the people are not living to the fullest potential that their nation can afford them; thus, their life is

“dreary”. In spite of this, the persona expresses the hope that the nation will be liberated from the shackles of repression at “noon”, a symbol of the height of hope.

In pursuit of this arduous task, he posits that urgent plans need to be made at “night” which symbolizes the period in which the people are under oppression. One of these plans is to whip up enthusiasm for the “revolt”, a word which undoubtedly denotes a revolution. Afterwards, there will be a build-up of arms with which to confront the perpetrators of his people’s trauma as they go into “armouries”. In what appears to be an ironic twist, the freedom fighters and other activists “stalk” the evil animal whose symbolism has been widened in this context to include both local and foreign regimes whose tyrannical tendencies have impoverished the people and placed them under undue hardships. This reversal of roles is set to register a significant effect on the outcome of the struggle which the persona perceptively identifies as utter defeat of the forces of oppression. The absoluteness of the defeat is marked by the persona taking “no trophies to show”, effectively leaving no memento of the vanquished tyrants. The only fit place for their remains and memories is the “swamp beneath the hills” where deadly predators and scavengers are raring to prey on their memories. It is pertinent to note that the persona sometimes depends on the pool of strength from other activists in which case he uses the first person plural pronoun “we” and ‘us’.

To undertake such an onerous task as a revolution involves more than building up arms for the confrontation; it involves resilience and a determination to see the revolt through to its planned conclusion. This is exactly the mindset of the personae of the poem “On Being Told of Torture” as they asseverate:

Time is not measured by the hourglass
but by the rivulets of blood

shed

and will be shed

Even though our bones crunch

our spirits will not break

until we make a

reckoning in the red bright book

of history (4-12).

The above provides a portrait of the cost of the revolution and the consequent need for fortitude. Lines 5-6 above registers the great price of the revolt hyperbolically as “rivulets of blood / shed / and will be shed”. It implies that the revolution carries with it the enormous price of loss of many human lives. Those who survive have to endure extremely harsh physical and psychological conditions that metaphorically make their “bones crunch”. In spite of this, the personae urges resilience as they note that “our spirits”, a reference to their mental composure, will not be crushed until victory is secured. The envisaged dramatic and enduring impact of the revolt is graphically rendered as a reckoning in the “red bright book / of history” where history is likened to a red book. The colour “red” is very important for its association with blood and therefore revolutions. Hence, the personae are actually saying that their uprising will carve an enviable niche among other historical revolutions.

Again, the poet-persona believes that for the revolution to be successful, he and his fellow freedom fighters need to live through it. Thus, in spite of his awareness of the pervading presence of death in the risky undertaking of a revolution, the persona of “Homecoming”, in his musing over the revolt from his cell firmly rejects

the singular beauty

of victory
 & death
death wipes out
the red blushes of the rose
the curvature of the thistle's neck
the rings on the desert tree
So I reject death now
 as counterproductive
terminal and deadly (12-21)

In the first three lines above, victory and death are reified to make the persona's rejection of their combined beauty very dramatic. His reasons for refusing to consider death, in particular, as worthwhile under this circumstance are outlined in the subsequent lines which give a visual account of hapless nature's engagement with it. As an illustration, the personified death "wipes out" the "red blushes" (beauty) of the rose, the "curvature" of the thistle's neck, and the "rings" on the desert tree. What is intriguing about the destruction of nature in this context is that the plants have varying levels of strength; yet, none of them has been successful in confronting death. It is obvious that the persona perceives death as an utterly undesirable condition. It is not astonishing that the persona rejects death in the interim, counting it as "counterproductive", "terminal", and "deadly", a force that is likely to derail the course of freedom chartered by the collective will of the people. Defiance of death is also expressed in the latter part of "On Being Told of Torture".

Notwithstanding this position on death, in a lucid moment, the poet-personae of the poem "Revolution" concedes that death might be an ally only on condition that the death of the

freedom activists marks the “birth”, the ushering in of a new era described in vivid agrarian images in which there is a harvest of “...the blossoming of fruit trees” (16), the

overabundance of rice,
 the overweight of the plantain
 the eternal season of fish,
 is the building of roads,
 schools, hospitals, homes for
 the aged, orphanages for love children
 and love (17-23).

The personae use the bumper harvest of fruits, rice, plantain, and fish as a metaphor for social development of the impoverished nation that has just emerged victorious from a bloody revolution in the areas of good roads, schools, hospitals, orphanages, to mention but a few.. Since its triumph necessitated the shedding of the blood of its fighters, it goes without saying that their death has generated a paradigm shift in the fortunes of their people. The lines, “For then we shall have died / as heroes, / only then” (24-26), affirm their belief that their death can only become a cause for celebration when it leads to the holistic freedom and development of their people.

Although the poet-persona appears to be bustling with hope and tenacity up to this point, there are moments when he plumbs the depths of despair whenever he is confronted with the possibility of the revolution’s failure. This is explicit in the first movement of “The Wayfarer Comes Home” subtitled “The Promise” whose persona bewails the seeming hopelessness of their struggle for total liberation in the face of heavy odds stacked against them, thus:

Oh how needless are all our days

and hours spent cutting our nails
 spent dreaming of victory
 How futile the child's request in the night

when he knows
 he seeks the impossible (82-87)

The opening lines above, which recall the futility of “days” and “hours” the personae spent preparing for a victory celebration, are tinged with despair by virtue of the exclamation “Oh” that begins the statement, and this runs through subsequent lines. He then draws an analogy between their hopeless situation and a child's nocturnal request which he definitely knows will not be granted. The resulting vacillation between hope and despair is rendered as the oxymoronic “forlorn hope” in the poem “Homecoming”. Elsewhere in *The House by the Sea*, the poet-persona's occasional lapse into desperation is described as “a haze, uncertainty” (“At times...” 2).

It is evident that the frame of mind needed for ultimate victory cannot be achieved solely through individual or national efforts. Consequently, the poet-persona taps into a universal pool of strength by associating with a global community of famous revolutionaries in a bid to gain proper knowledge about the true nature of a revolution, to orient himself towards it, and to elucidate the role of poetry in the discharge of the revolution.

Toward the end of the poem “For Pablo Neruda”, the persona highlights this global community when he asserts “I await the secrets / I am part of you, hombre / part of the octopus of this undying liberty” (43-45). Liberty is compared to an octopus which has many tentacles to signal that the struggle for liberty occurs across divers geographical and political spaces but the participants are linked by the same desire for freedom. His association in this context is with

Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet-diplomat and militant communist who is forced into exile for fear of arrest by the pro-democracy forces in Chile. It is alleged that he is killed years after he is injected with a lethal substance. He is known to have articulated his people's struggle for social justice and freedom even in the face of possible imprisonment and execution through the "...vast sea of your cantos" (21) by which the masses "salute the bandera (flag) of liberty" (24 addition mine). More simply, he uses his poetry to shed light on the injustice embedded in the society and the need to fight against them, thereby enlightening his people. Neruda's penchant for social justice makes the persona link him to Lautaro, alluded to earlier in the poem, who led indigenous Chilean resistance against Spanish imperialism.

The persona also makes an apt allusion to Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh, Chinese and Vietnamese revolutionaries who led the Red Army to endure the harshness of the long march and the travails of military dictatorship respectively, thereby "...planting the lamps in the east" (12). These lamps are symbolic of freedom of China and the waves of freedom their success fostered in Asia. By identifying with these freedom activists across the globe, the persona imbibes tenacity, self-sacrifice and the need to appropriate poetry as a tool to deal with the social imbalances evident in his society. The force of the persona's identification with these revolutionaries is carried by his use of an apostrophe: he addresses Neruda directly using the subjective and objective forms of the second person pronoun "you" and "yours".

To assert that the success of the revolt is only the beginning of a new era is an understatement. The revolution which culminates in the demolition of the citadel of tyranny imposes new responsibilities on the freed masses to ensure that the new paradigm of freedom and justice is maintained. These responsibilities are represented in agrarian imagery in what is structurally the

third part of the poem “Personal Note” where the persona instructs that the victory ceremony following the successful revolution be momentarily suspended until:

we’ve tilled the land
 ploughed over this harvest of tears
 erect proper fences to keep out
 the sorrows and the sorrowers [sic]
 prepare new sowing songs
 arm our sons with the blade
 and handle of love (20-26)

The land is symbolic of the freed nation which requires her citizens to work hard to create new opportunities for their development as the words “tilled”, “ploughed”, “harvest”, “erect”, “prepare”, “new”, and “arm” suggest. Ploughing over a “harvest of tears” means working hard to ensure that the moderate gains achieved through the toil of the revolutionaries are used as a solid platform for future endeavours.

Another responsibility is to “keep out / the sorrows and the sorrowers [sic]” which are symbolic of the causes and perpetrators of the people’s malaise respectively. More simply, the personae advise that the post-revolution society creates values and laws that will effectively nip any tyrannical tendencies in the bud, so to speak. The next step involves memorializing the revolution and the new pattern of administration in songs possibly to serve as a reference point for future actions. The appropriation of songs point to the remarkable role the arts will play in the new republic. Again, “our sons”, that is, future generations are fortified with love for all. Once all these preparations have been done, the nation can be developed using the fresh “tears” or efforts of the new generation, thereby leading to the holistic development of the new nation.

4.4.0 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has examined *Poems from a Prison Cell* and *The House by the Sea* as platforms of testimony through which imprisoned artists are able to deploy various strategies to repulse trauma, and a number of interesting issues emerge which establish the degree to which poetry can serve as a therapeutic medium for people exposed to the traumatic event of imprisonment.

In *Poems from a Prison Cell*, the poet-persona deploys several conventional strategies including reconnecting with people outside prison, creating alternative memories, and contesting the suffocating space of prison by relocating his consciousness to enchanting natural scenery. Regarding the poet-persona's reconnection with other people, it is observed that he has two types of people within his orbit. The first group consists of people outside prison, whereas the second one is composed of fellow inmates. Through his association with friends and family from outside prison on visiting days, he is able to generate the much-needed human warmth to repulse the psychological effects of imprisonment. Therefore, it is no wonder that the anticipation of such visits create uncontrollable euphoria signalled by insomnia and its concomitant hyperactivity among the inmates as well as their fidgeting "like beasts anxious to be moved", as revealed in the poem "visiting day tremors set in the night before". In relishing the warmth of joy of communing with the outside world, the persona bonds with other inmates to "feast" their eyes on their visitors after literally floating "up the stairs".

But all too often, the joy of interacting with the outside world is marred by the presence of other prisoners who appear to be insulated from the warmth emanating from such fellowships. One such prisoner is described in the poem "isolated in their midst" as "isolated", "untouched" and as

possessing a face that is “a wasteland”. It is clear that in the absence of outsiders to create a positive platform for interaction, the prisoners are estranged from each other because of the knowledge of their common plight as exemplified in the poem “i see the diminishing of spirit”.

In the case of the poet-persona of *The House by the Sea*, his reconnection with the outside world has the double significance of confronting the trauma of physical confinement and stoking the fire of the revolution. His reconnections with his daughter and the friendly warder who earnestly urges him to be unperturbed by the inhuman tactics of the repressive regime in the poems “To Sika on Her 11th Birthday” and “Today...” respectively have personal refreshment for the persona as well as salvoes to drive the envisaged uprising that will topple dictatorship. It is obvious that the poet-persona relishes the comfort of communicating with his daughter and the friendliness of the warder, but his devotion to the rebellion is unparalleled. He assures his daughter that some day soon they will all be free, indicating that confinement and the force that shapes it will be destroyed. In a similar fashion, the friendly warder of “Today...” earnestly entreats the persona to buoy up his confidence in order to realize his dream of freedom and development for his people. Sometimes too, the poet-persona reconnects with others for the sake of the revolution. A classic example is his bonding with Pablo Neruda, Mao Zedong, and Ho Chi Minh in the poem “For Pablo Neruda”. He draws strength from this wide-ranging circle of freedom fighters in order to stage a revolution that will uproot the cause of imprisonment, exile and other manifestations of oppression.

Again, nature which is sometimes combined with memory, fantasy and other strategies is appropriated in the fight against trauma. Matthews’ *Poems from a Prison Cell* shows its poet-persona tenaciously hanging on to the natural world in order to wrest some hope and decency from prison. In respect of this, the persona of “it lays there so invitingly”, for example, projects

his consciousness onto the beauty of a mountain, comparing it to the entrancing figure of a woman. The strength and beauty he derives from this experience is brazenly truncated by the intruding awareness of his incarceration, a fact that is substantiated by the poet-persona's engagement with nature in other poems in *Poems from a Prison Cell*. Accordingly, the persona is deprived of the full complement of nature's therapeutic influence, enshrouding him in a subdued atmosphere.

Awoonor's *The House by the Sea* also showcases the poet-persona's appropriation of nature as a bulwark against prison trauma as exemplified in the poem "The Place" where he relishes the aerial agility of seagulls under the blazing sun. As is the experience of Matthews' poet-persona, the prison mechanic of being locked up becomes an impediment; nevertheless, Awoonor's persona defies this obstruction and rather uses it as an opportunity to "recall" his earlier encounter with nature. Unlike Matthews' text, there are instances in *The House by the Sea* in which the persona's personal encounter with the natural world becomes an opportunity to reenact the struggle for his people's emancipation. In other instances, natural images are used by the poet-persona of Awoonor's text to urge the exile to return home, as demonstrated in the fourth segment of "The Wayfarer Comes Home" where the exile is urged to "follow the call of the wren / and the evening bell cry of the pigeon dove" (52-53) as he returns home. Finally, the post-revolution development of the persona's oppressed nation is cast in agrarian imagery of bumper harvest.

From the foregoing, it is observable that though the two texts converge on the use of such strategies as reconnection with other people and nature, these strategies are mostly used for different purposes and with different degrees of success. On the whole, it appears Matthews' poet-persona is less successful in dealing with personal trauma than his counterpart in

Awoonor's text. Lastly, though it is doubtful whether the level of freedom and development envisaged by the persona of The House by the Sea is realistic, one must concede that his flaming hope for its success is laudable.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AD RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Summary, Findings and Conclusions

This thesis set forth to explore the possibility of expressing and confronting trauma in the critical space of prison using James Matthews' *Poems from a Prison Cell* and Kofi Awoonor's *The House by the Sea* as test cases. This quest is provoked by the conceptualization of trauma as a wound that cannot be expressed through any media, least of all, poetry, and the consequent call for a rethinking of trauma to incorporate the possibility of healing. In view of the fact that western notions form the mainspring of trauma thinking coupled with the fact that no sustained study of the prison works of African political prisoners has been conducted from a trauma-theoretical perspective with the aim of confronting trauma, this study appropriates western notions of trauma.

As is clear from the discussion up to this point, the two primary texts provide different configurations of trauma that seem to suggest that there is a glimmer of hope for those confronted with traumatizing events

Chapter Three opens the discussion by exploring the extent to which poetry expresses trauma within the parameters of trauma themes of history and memory. This discussion is informed by the thinking in certain critical circles that "After Auschwitz...to write a poem is barbaric" (as qtd. in Howe 429). With respect to history, *Poems from a Prison Cell* and *The House by the Sea* frame prison as a traumatic event, concentrating on aspects of imprisonment such as the cell,

punishment regimes, unbearable sounds, and the obvious deprivation woven into the system, among others. In spite of this, it is observed that the poet-persona of Matthews' text appears to be more overwhelmed by the mere fact of his imprisonment, frequently capturing it in more destructive imagery than his counterpart in Awoonor's text to corroborate an important notion of prison trauma: the degree of an inmate's helplessness in the face of the dynamics of prison is determined in part by the circumstances of their imprisonment and by their ability to effectively use the requisite strategies to fight against these effects.

It also becomes evident that the perception of prison as having the capacity to inflict havoc on the psyche of the inmate shows the extent to which prison trauma can overpower the defense mechanism of the prisoner. The psychological effects are captured as the motifs of loneliness, lack of time structuring and boredom, fear, and death, to mention but a few. The poet-persona of *Poems from a Prison Cell* exhibits these effects to the degree that he appears helpless as he captures them in imageries of death, wanton and utter destruction, and other worldliness.

Again, it is realized that although Awoonor's text is not as pronounced as Matthews' text in the individual's confrontation with the psychological effects of confinement, it frames the slave fort-prison as the site that provokes memories of the traumatizing Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade whose effect, in the reasoned opinion of Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang, reaches down to the present (1). In effect, prison becomes a symbolic device that reaches back into time to reanimate these traumatizing memories and links them to the present. Thus, the poet-persona of *The House by the Sea* argues that the problems of oppression, exemplified by the traumatic experiences of prison, torture, bloodshed, hunger, and exile, encountered by post-colonial African states mimic the Slave Trade. It is also clear that exile is an unbounded prison with its own characteristic features which the persona grapples with.

Again, it is perceived that traumatic amnesia is an exception rather than the rule in an inmate's confrontation with trauma. With reference to individual trauma, it is clear that, in both primary texts, the personae are very conscious of their confinement and are able to link their discomfort to it. Thus, they make frantic and conscious efforts to suppress it, which is at variance with the trauma hypothesis that the traumatic event does not register on the consciousness of the victims, making it theoretically impossible for them to recall it at will. In a similar fashion, traumatic amnesia does not occur in respect of collective trauma of the people in *The House by the Sea* because of the enduring presence of the slave fort which is a constant reminder of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its harrowing effects on the contemporary lives of the people. The absence of traumatic amnesia in both texts has implications for dealing with trauma.

Chapter Four of this study pays particular attention to the degree to which poetry facilitates prisoners' confrontation with trauma through various strategies that it places at their disposal. It is evident from *Poems from a Prison Cell* and *The House by the Sea* that prisoners engage the disconcerting effects of imprisonment by having recourse to the motifs of reconnection with people outside prison, nature, fantasy, and escape in dreams, which enable them to contest the limited space imposed upon them by the prison system, and which can be used alone or in configuration with other motifs. On a personal level, the personae of the two texts use it to divert their attention from the acutely distressing conditions of confinement. However, the experiences of the poet-persona of Matthews' text indicates that these themes prisoners employ to reconstitute their humanity are, on many occasions, undermined by their inescapable awareness of their physical circumscription.

What emerges from *The House by the Sea* is the fact that highly political prison inmates engage two main types of trauma: personal and collective. In combating these, some prisoners expressly

use the aforesaid motifs to repulse the distressing effects of confinement on their psyche, but there are instances in which efforts geared toward personal liberation dovetail into the collective struggle for liberation from the traumatic experience of tyranny which is a modern day expression of the Slave Trade. For example, the persona's desire for freedom actuates him to demand that the "wailing wall" of his prison crumble. Elsewhere he prophesies concerning prison that "One day it will burst / it must burst" ("The First Circle" 9-10). His call feeds into the struggle to emancipate the people from oppression since prison is a manifest expression of dictatorship.

As a preliminary step toward the final revolt, it is impressed on exiles to develop affection for their native land and return home, but this step is inadequate in solving the problem of exile because the conditions of oppressions which occasion it in the first place are still prevailing. Sometimes, the exile experiences the greatest irony of returning home only to be incarcerated in a slave fort "now home at home" ("hot nights" 16).

Fundamentally, the poet-persona uses the aforementioned motifs especially natural and agrarian imagery to call for the destruction of the two dimensions of prison, jail and exile. For example, against the backdrop of natural imagery, the poet-persona of Awoonor's *The House by the Sea* desires "to crumble this wailing wall" ("Much here the tinker said" 42) of his prison. With respect to exile, in the fourth segment of the poem "The Wayfarer Comes Home", he calls the exile to "Hurry on home, wayfarer / leave the sooty cities of the evil animal" (54-55) even though it becomes obvious that the exile's return home is marked by an ironic twist: he ends up in jail. To correct this, the poet-persona uses the motifs of reconnection, nature and fantasy to express the urgent need for a bloody revolution that will utterly destroy dictatorship. Activists involved in such an uprising must simultaneously reject and embrace death, connect with other

revolutionaries across the world, and show no quarter to the perpetrators of their people's socio-political and economic malaise.

What this thesis finds worrying is the insistence of the poet-persona of *The House by the Sea* on a bloody revolution as the panacea to the trauma of tyranny and dictatorship when it is obvious that "local...cudgels", metonym of local perpetrators of oppression, are complicit in the mangling of the post-colonial nation so it is evident that it takes more than a physical revolution to address the situation. This thesis advocates cultural renaissance as a prop to the envisaged revolution.

It is observed that the tone of the two texts play a crucial role in determining the extent to which poetry may be successful in granting relief to the poet-personae as they confront prison trauma. The most important parameter for determining the extent of poetry's success in this respect is to consider the imagery that the two poet-personae employ in their respective texts. *Poems from a Prison Cell* is teeming with dark imagery of destruction used to express trauma and its effects on the psyche of the prisoner-persona so that even when he wrests a measure of relief from his ordeal in confinement, he is still constrained by the "... realization / of confinement behind bars" ("night invites me through dreams" 11-12). On the other hand, *The House by the Sea* is dominant in images that register the poet-persona's defiance against the prison system and the forces of oppression that instituted it in the first place, noting that "it must burst" ("The First Circle" 10).

From the foregoing, it can be asserted that poetry helps some people to work through personal trauma as exemplified in the *Poems from a Prison Cell*, or to stave it off as demonstrated in *The House by the Sea*. Regarding cultural trauma such as that caused by the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, poetry provides the platform to express and confront it squarely, a fact which resonates with a rhetorical question posed in the Awoonor's text, "Where are those swear, / poetry has

nothing to do with it” ; moreover, poetry provides the framework for keeping the hope of eventual liberation alive, even though this thesis expresses skepticism about the effectiveness of a bloody revolution, divorced from an enduring cultural renaissance, in establishing a sustainable paradigm of true freedom and development.

Another important observation the discussion brings to light is the scope of application of prisoners’ experiences. It is immediately obvious that the experiences of the poet-persona of Awoonor’s *The House by the Sea* are simultaneously personal, national, and sometimes even global because of allusions to names and places such as “Pablo Neruda”, “negro woman”, “buzzards of Sharpeville”, and “house of Ussher”. On the other hand, Matthews’ *Poems from a Prison Cell* appears very personal, rarely focusing on other people; however, there is a sense in which it has a ring of universality to it. The poet-persona achieves this by not mentioning specific names and dates of events so that people in similar situations can readily identify with his experiences.

5.1 Recommendations

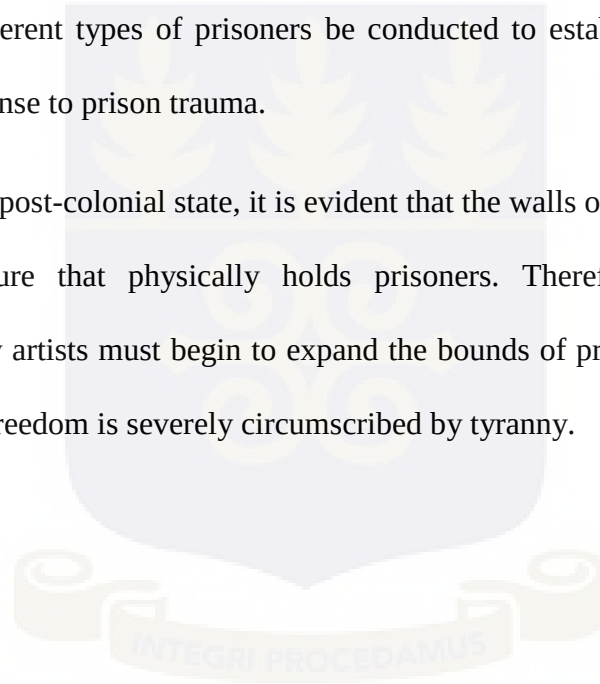
Prison is a fertile space for literary exploration of trauma with a focus on ways in which it can be repulsed; nonetheless, it appears not much critical attention has been given to it. And this thesis is one of the critical works to steer in this direction.

Thus far, the discussion has concentrated particularly on the expression of the effects of trauma on the psyche of the poet-personae as well as on the extent to which poetry facilitates the persona’s confrontation with trauma. Much as this exercise reveals a lot about the degree to which poetry is beneficial to the prisoner, a study which undertakes a biographical study of the

two poets to measure their post-release mental composure will be very rewarding. This study should focus on the post-prison literary works of James Matthews and Kofi Awoonor such as *No Time for Dreams* (1981) and *Comes the Voyager At Last* (1992) respectively to determine the extent to which these two poets are purged of prison trauma.

Again, even though it is established earlier in the Background to the Study that there are different types of prisoners, namely, common-law, prisoners-of-war, and political, this study focuses on the political prisoners. Therefore, this thesis recommends that a study that takes account of the prison works of the different types of prisoners be conducted to establish the similarities and differences in their response to prison trauma.

Finally, in respect of the post-colonial state, it is evident that the walls of prison are not limited to the architectural structure that physically holds prisoners. Therefore, this study further recommends that literary artists must begin to expand the bounds of prison to include the wider republic whose right to freedom is severely circumscribed by tyranny.



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