

Reading Chinua Achebe's "Vultures" as a Call to Beyond the Binaries

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Celebrated universally, especially with the advent of postcolonial studies, as a novelist and critic, Achebe's literary output in these genres always come more readily to attention than his poetry. Achebe's poetry has more or less remained invisible to critical attention, poetry anthologists and English curriculum framers. But it is interesting to note that Achebe took his poetry very seriously (more seriously than the critics have done!). He points this out in the opening lines of his preface (tellingly, but characteristically, titled "In Lieu of a Preface: A Parable"), to the publication of his *Collected Poems* (Achebe, 2004):

The author began to worry about his own conduct. Perhaps he had not been fair to his poems. Yes, the same poetry that had surged from the depths to bring pain-soaked solace in the breach and darkness of civil war. (Achebe, 2004, ix)

His poetry held a special place in his heart, for they evoked in his mind the circumstances under which they were 'reared' while at the same time triggering and intensifying a sense of guilt in him for having neglected it ('heedless parent', as he saw himself in relation to his poetry):

In time the poems, like all children reared in hardship, grew tougher and wiser than their peers. They figured out that as offspring of a heedless parent they were fated to find their own way in the world. (Achebe, 2004, ix)

Upon a reading of the preface, it becomes clear that Achebe was himself dissatisfied at the reception of his poetry in spite of it having been awarded such a prestigious award as the inaugural Commonwealth Poetry Award:

They [the poems] went out one early morning in search of validation and returned at nightfall singing and dancing and bearing aloft the trophy of Commonwealth Poetry. A few ripples, but no waves. They contrived something breathtakingly audacious: they got Her Britannic Majesty to invoke six of their lines to end a royal admonition to her Commonwealth in crisis. *Remember also your children for they in their time*

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