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STRUCTURE AND CHARACTERISATION

AS METAPHORS FOR NEUROLOGICAL DISORDER IN CHRIS ABANI'S GRACELAND

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Masters of Arts

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the partial fulfilment for the degree of Masters of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Benjamin Ohwovoriole
30th day of January 2009

ABSTRACT

Graceland is a figurative narrative. Although the writer grapples with ideas of national identity and relations of power, the text primarily comes across as a vivid metaphor that stirs disturbing imagery of a particular nation. Chris Abani achieves this through the structure of the novel and the characterisation he employs.

In Graceland, Abani draws the reader's attention to the nature of the post-colony through a country that became independent politically in 1960. His submission, in this fictive work, is that Nigeria is a fractured nation 45 years on. There are tensions within the polity, resulting in instability and anarchy of values. This tragedy is dramatised through the lives of the ordinary people, but it poignantly suggests the failure of the elite, who are largely silent in Graceland, but callously omniscient in the text.

In this work, I intend to examine how the writer, amongst other things, aestheticises the broken nature of the post-colonial African state in the 21st century.

This study is salient because Chris Abani belongs to the generation of Nigerian writers, whose sensibilities have been influenced by a socio-political environment largely different from those that have inspired the writings of the first and second waves of Nigerian writers, who populated Nigeria's literary landscapes of the 60s and 80s.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my nephew, Dr. Hilary Akpowowo
1979 – 2006

For him who fell among reapers
Who forestall the harvest
- Idanre

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Many thanks to:

God:	For His grace in my time of need.
Prof. James Ogude:	For his patience and guidance. His gentle voice was the spring in which I found refreshment and strength in my quest for knowledge.
My parents:	For their love. Their awesome sacrifices are etched in my memory, and they are evergreen.
My siblings:	For their faith and endless prayers. The labour of their knees restored me.
My wife and kids:	For their resilience in the face of my adversity.
Dr. Efe Useh:	For his selflessness and true friendship.

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“The colonial departure from the scene was not really a departure. I mean independence was unreal.” – *Chinua Achebe*

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In a study by Amuta (1989) African literature has always been concerned with politics and issues of a fundamentally political nature. According to this scholar, what differentiates one generation of writers from the other is the nature and intensity of the political challenges that it has to grapple with and recreate its art (p.56).

Graceland, as a work of art, is a figurative narrative. Although the writer grapples with ideas of national identity and relations of power, the novel primarily comes across as a vivid metaphor that stirs disturbing imagery of a particular nation, Nigeria. The text achieves this through its structure and the characterisation Chris Abani employs not just to dramatise the lives of the ordinary people, but also to poignantly show the failure of the elite, who are largely silent in Graceland, but callously omniscient in the text.

The Nigeria that emerges out of Graceland is a fractured nation whose condition has been made worse by the political conflicts within the polity with its resultant instability and anarchy of values. This subject matter and the themes that Graceland treats are definitely not peculiar to Chris Abani.

However, this study is important. It is significant because it shows some of the new trends that populate Nigeria's literary landscape: Chris Abani belongs to the third generation of Nigerian writers, whose sensibilities have been influenced by a socio-political environment largely different from those that inspired the writings of the Nigerian writers of the 60s, 70s and 80s.

Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dutton (2005), in discussing what sets the first and second generations of Nigerian writers apart from the third generation writers, state that:

> The imperative of historical revisionism transformed colonialism into the master narrative whose claims first and second generation writers sought to deconstruct and this led to a traditionalisation of creative space and idiom, spelt out in the valorisation of rural settings in the fiction of [Chinua] Achebe and Elechi Amadi or the privileging of rituals in the drama of Soyinka and John Pepper Clark. Although a certain radical Marxist bent distinguishes their work from that of the first generation, second-generation writers such as [Femi] Osofisan and Niyi Osundare operated principally from the perspective of the traditionalist urtext. The departure from this urtext[i] is, arguably, the most significant distinguishing feature of Nigeria's third generation [writers] (p.13)[1].

The "urtext" is the ritualist centre, which these scholars state Harry Garuba has argued is constructed on a foundation of historical and traditional totalities. According to them, the privileging

[1] Adesanmi, Pius, and Chris Dunton (2005) *Nigeria's Third Generation Writing: Historiography and Preliminary Theoretical Considerations*. English in Africa, 32.1

of ritual is absent in third generation works of Nigerian writers. This, therefore, is one of the characteristics that define the generation that Chris Abani belongs to. Also, they argue that the setting in a third generation work is generally euromodernist. As a result of this copious investment in urban experience, they conclude that this is the ultimate pillar that establishes the defining characteristic of Nigeria's third generation texts.

This is not true. Graceland, unlike many other works by the third generation writers, is not totally set in an urban centre: In Graceland, the rural Nigeria is not in a periphery. It is an integral part of the text's discourse, and Chris Abani gives the events that unfold in Afikpo equal attention as those that take place in Lagos and its environs. Also, Chris Abani does not distance himself from traditional rituals. In fact, rituals, in both traditional and contemporary forms, are at the core of Graceland. Certain events in the text buttress this argument: for example, when Uncle Joseph declares that "Today, Elvis, you are going to kill your first eagle" (p.18), the first step into manhood is announced because it is the traditional ritual that begins the manhood rites. On the other hand, the chained children in Chapter Twenty-Two (p.230) are another form of ritual: a contemporary type. It is the belief of Nigerians that when kids are kidnapped, they are used to perform moneymaking rituals. In this case, however, the children in Graceland don't become zombies that spit money; instead, they are kidnapped, killed and their fresh body parts are then sold. I consider this a contemporary ritual that facilitates inordinate wealth.

Thus, Chris Abani's literary technique in Graceland is akin to a double-edged sword: The narrative clearly establishes that the writer does not, contrary to the argument by Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dutton, isolate himself from the literary nationalism that turned colonial experience into the master narrative whose assertions first and second generation writers sought to deconstruct by traditionalising creative space. Simultaneously, Graceland is explicit in its portrayal of the fact that Chris Abani does not accept the prescriptive nature of second-generation neo-Marxist writers because, in Graceland, he interrogates every ideology critically. Although he sneers at capitalism, yet he does not obtusely lean towards socialism in spite of the fact that Graceland advocates African communalism: In this text, the author engages in a denunciation of both capitalism and socialism by simply interrogating the opinions and actions of members of every social class as they construct their own understanding of the society, based on their personal experiences. In essence, Graceland is neither wholly euromodernist, as suggested by Harry Garuba, or totally constructed on a foundation of historical and traditional totalities. This is a unique feature of the text.

Another distinctive quality of this text is that mentioned in this chapter's second paragraph, which announces the main concern of this study: Graceland as a metaphor. Vividly made manifest in the text through its structure and its characterisation, this trope is considered a neurological[ii] metaphor in this study.

J.A. Cuddon (1999) explains that metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another. Neurological metaphor, as used in this study, evokes the idea that Graceland is the metaphorical exploration of the complex, sophisticated system that regulates and coordinates body activities of the Nigerian nation, which this study considers one of the text's major characters. Therefore, Graceland unnerves the status quo in a medical context. This is another point of departure that heralds Graceland's exceptionality in spite of the fact that tropes or figures of speech deserve a reader's special attention.

Metaphor is not used in isolation in Graceland. In the text, there is a reliance on insidious literary devices that the writer employs to agitate a reader's sensibility in order to enhance the text's imagery. I find them a rarity in the literary landscape of Nigeria. Thus, they deserve a close study in an attempt to discern and dissect the mind of a young writer representative of his generation. The third chapter, also, looks at these devices closely and critically.

This research report does not use metaphor as the only premise of its findings. The theoretical frameworks this research report uses to accomplish its goals, also, influence some of the arguments within it. One is structuralist narratology. The other is New Historicism.

Structuralist narratology is another kind of structuralism, which is the science of narrative. According to this theory as posits by Bressler (1994), a "story's meaning develops from its overall

structure, its langue, rather than from each individual story's isolated theme" (p.64). One of the corner stones of this research report is the position that Graceland's structure embodies, metaphorically, some of the significant meaning of the work. Structurally, there is a spasmodic feel that alienates Graceland from the majority of other contemporary texts, which have emerged out of the community of Nigerian writers. The continuous oscillation between settings – Lagos and Afikpo – jolts the reader's consciousness in a manner that is similar to muscle spasms, which is a sign of nervous system disorder. Also, the fusion of anthropological records and contemporary history is symbolic structurally. It evokes the image of a restless being, whose situation is made pathetic by a continuous pull – which is a struggle – towards the ways of his forebears and the demands of modernity. This, of course, is symptomatic of neurological disorder since it suggests a lack of coordination or a functional disorder. In fact, certain nervous system disorders are identifiable in the text. First, there is a functional disorder like epilepsy. Muscular Dystrophy is another form of neurological disease, which Chris Abani's Graceland explores metaphorically. Alzheimer's disease, also, finds a place in the metaphoric exploit of Chris Abani in Graceland (See Chapter 3).

New Historicism, as a theory, believes that there is an elaborate relationship between an aesthetic object (the text) and society. Bressler (1994) in discussing New Historicism argues: "all texts are really social documents that not only reflect but also, and more importantly, respond to their historical situations" (p.132). Graceland is a social document because it responds to a particular

historical situation by exploring the effects of Nigeria's socio-dynamics and its impacts on the citizens. Ernest Emenyonu (1991) points out the implication of such a literary work by arguing that "clear and direct" texts are:

> … emotionally moving and the human conflicts which they portray are something [people] anywhere any time can associate with and voluntarily respond to … [because] literature in this sense communicates with the reader" (p.16 – 17).

Graceland does this perfectly well. The text attempts to recreate life, and Chris Abani's lucid depiction of a lurid existence is truly emotional. Besides the fact that there is a sense of déjà vu that brings to life historical moments that are both hilarious and disdainful, Chris Abani's use of characters is a statement: In terms of characterisation, schizophrenia and madness define the nature of a greater number of the novel's characters – Joshua Bandele-Thomas, the Colonel, Sunday Oke and the King of Beggars (See Chapter 3). They exemplify forms of neurological disorders that suggest that there is a problem with their brains – forgetfulness and loss of feeling. Of course, they are all a personification of degeneration, which is a nervous system disorder that may manifest itself through Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), Huntington's chorea, and Alzheimer's disease

New Historicism, also, allows the reader to better appreciate the structure of Graceland. This is because the sequence of events, as they alternate between two spaces – Afikpo and Lagos – is an embodiment of Foucault's postulation (cited in Bressler 1994), which states that "history is not linear, for it does not have a definite beginning, middle, and end" (p.31). This Michel Foucault's theory, which has influenced New Historicists, stands out as the basis for Graceland's structure because the narrative is fundamentally non-linear.

In chapter two, "Literature Review", this research engages, critically, the major thematic and ideological pre-occupations identifiable in the literature of the Nigerian nation. However, ultimately, chapter two delineates between Chris Abani's work and those of the older Nigerian writers in terms of narrative style; that is, besides ideological inclination. Establishing this dichotomy in this research report is important because in a study by Chielozona Eze (2005), the scholar states that "Abani invests heavily in a scatological portrayal of reality" and that in Graceland "the ills of the Nigerian society are depicted with considerable narrative brio" (p.99)[2]. What this suggests is that there is a copious individual style of the writer that sets his text apart from existing body of works that is known as Nigerian Literature. The validity of such claims, therefore, requires a critical interrogation. This, again, gives credence to the need to engage Graceland as a representative

[2] Chielozona Eze (2005) Cosmopolitan solidarity: negotiating transculturality in contemporary Nigerian novels. *English in Literature*, 32 (1), 99 – 113p

work of the new voices of the national literature of Nigeria. This approach is sacrosanct because, as Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dutton (2005) states, "the generational approach remains one of the cornerstones of literary criticism largely due to the possibilities it offers for a systematic understanding of literary trends and currents synchronically and diachronically."[iii]

The crux of structuralist narratology and New Historicism informs my pre-occupation in the third chapter of this report. This chapter shows how the writer responds, artistically, to the Nigerian dilemma through the structure of his text and the characterisation he explores to dramatise the ills of the Nigerian nation. Basically, Chris Abani depicts Nigeria as a character with neurological flaws. Her children, the imaginary citizens that are the other characters that populate the text, inherit some of these nervous system diseases. This section of my research report, therefore, concerns itself with the use of organic, telescoped and subdued metaphors as imagery that conveys the ills of the post-colonial state. This chapter also interrogates Chris Abani's use of some other literary devices with the intention to show how text manifests these neurological disorders through the use of symbolism and other figures of speech.

The last chapter, which is the conclusion, succinctly presents the various arguments that are made in this research report towards justifying the significance of Chris Abani in the body of works that are regarded as Nigerian Literature. Graceland is of significant importance since Chris Abani's

intervention is in the realm of neurology because he traces the roots of the paroxysm that jerks the nation into incoherent state and, which drives it towards schizophrenia.

In so doing, this report draws attention to the contributions of new voices in providing insights into the social dynamics of the contemporary Nigerian society as informed by the last years of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century. This, it is believed, will engender a new curiosity in the works of majority of Africa's young writers since there is the tendency by scholars and students of African literature to focus still on the canonical writers thereby sidelining the contributions of the new generation.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This chapter is a discourse on the thematic concerns and ideological posture of Chris Abani in Graceland, and it serves to ascertain the collection of ideas – conflation – that populate the literature of the Nigerian people with the hope of delineating – swings between extremes – between Chris Abani's idiosyncrasy and those of the earlier Nigerian writers. For the purpose of this study, I wish to state that three generations of Nigerian writers are identifiable in my discourse: the first generation is made up of writers who published a text by 1970: the year the Nigerian civil war ended. The second generation constitutes the authors whose first texts were published between 1970 and 1983. As a result, it is safe to say that the third generation of Nigerian writers was heralded in1984. Chris Abani's first text, Masters of the Board, was published in 1985. This, therefore, situates him amongst the third generation of Nigerian writers.

Kalu Ogbaa (2003), argues that the purveyors of the Nigerian literary culture overcame:

> … a process of mental imperialism [in order] to develop the discourse and rhetoric of literary aesthetics and interpretation that enabled them to refute the characterisations of the Nigerian people and culture and the society by foreign writers (xii).

Thus, literary aesthetics found expression through a creative process in which writers and critics overwhelming relied on Nigerian vernacular elements. With this form of nationalism, this era, therefore, witnessed writers fighting in concert with pan-African politicians to liberate the people from European domination mentally and politically.

The group's thematic concerns shifted from the issues emanating from their disdain for colonialism when the writers were faced with the challenges of independence. As they analysed the situations and conditions prevalent in their new societies, themes like neo-colonialism, ethnic and national clashes and distrust, military dictatorships, famine, and socio-political instability became causes for anxiety. One copious concern of the writers of this era is the baseness of postcolonial leadership in Nigeria as demonstrated in texts like A Man of the People and The Interpreters.

A literature devoid of the combativeness that identifies the works of the colonial period emerged in 1971. This characteristic illustrates the nature of the second generation of Nigerian writers whose main pre-occupation was how to inculcate the patriotic spirit in the citizens, who were just emerging from a vile war. In order words, literature became a tool that may be used to campaign for the survival and unity of the Nigerian nation. However, the second-generation Nigerian writers are not very much concerned with the life of the nation as orchestrated, directly, by the political leaders and those in the corridors of power. Simply, the elites were not the primary dramatic personae in

their creative works when compared with their overbearing presence in the works of earlier writers canonised by Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and their peers. Instead, the stories they tell mirror what Biodun Jeyifo calls "the suffering and anguished consciousness of characters confronted by a nightmarish reality" (p. 280).[3]

In the same vein, the third-generation Nigerian writers wrestle with a reality that has provoked stories that reflect the colossal damage that has been inflicted on a people that Wole Soyinka describes as a "wasted generation". Heather Hewett (2005) argues that the emerging account of this generation is one of triumph over adversity, a story of courageous individuals refusing to be silenced by a corrupt, inept and brutal authority.[4] And, for Tanure Ojaide (1995), these narratives are an indication that there is a departure from previous literary trends.[5] These positions, according to Heather Hewett, are informed by the fact that:

> … younger writers are not only setting themselves apart from earlier generations (most of all the first) but also attempting to redefine Nigerian Literature through their craft, both in their choice of subject and style.

[3] Jeyifo, Biodun (1988) Ben Okri. In: Ogunbiyi, Yemi ed. *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature: 1700 to the Present.* Vol. 2 Lagos, Guardian Books

[4] Hewett, Heather (2005) Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the voice of the third generation. *English in Literature* 32 (1), 73 – 98p

[5] Ojaide, Tanure (1995) *New Trends in Modern African Poetry* Research in African Literatures, 26.1, 4 - 19

Heather Hewett further argues that:

> … there are enough writers whose work is fresh and different from what came before to suggest that yes, change is afoot; and collectively, the third generation does seem to be taking Nigerian Literature in new directions.[6]

This "new directions" is defined by Chielozona Eze as "the condition of transculturality" that suggests "the existence of interstices, or the state of endless crossing of boundaries."[7]

Graceland is the chronicles of the adventures of Elvis, a young impressionable youth, who was snapped from the tranquillity of Afikpo – a village – by uncontrollable circumstances in the life of his father and, then, dumped in Lagos – a city, which has been described as dangerous but exhilarating.

In the character of the city text, Elvis struggles in a locale that Wendy Griswold (2000) calls "an urban milieu where the city itself, rather than some particular antagonist, is the object against which the protagonist contends".[8] In this condition, as Wendy Griswold argues, a character is not "nostalgic about an essentialised African past nor does he believe in monolithic, immutable tropes

[6] Hewett, Heather (2005) Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the voice of the third generation. *English in Literature* 32 (1), 73 – 98p
[7] Chielozona Eze (2005) Cosmopolitan solidarity: negotiating transculturality in contemporary Nigerian novels. *English in Literature*, 32 (1), 99 – 113p
[8] Wendy Griswold (2000) Bearing Witness – Readers, Writers and the Novel in Nigeria, Princeton UP: New Jersey, 144

of identity" (p. 144). In other words, the character has not just crossed a geographical boundary; he has crossed a metaphysical one as well. He is, therefore, caught in the clasp of the consequences that are the aftermath of this transculturality as made worse by the silent and ubiquitous leadership in the post-colony.

Wendy Griswold further argues that in a typical Nigerian text, the presence of tradition and modernity are an imperative. However, she states that their "swirling elements flow in and out of one another as they are stirred together, but they never blend into a singular tone" (p.4). As a result, she concludes: "The Nigerian text offers an unusually good case through which to examine cultural construction as a process that is simultaneously global and local" (p.4).

Thematically, Graceland weaves together many of the themes that Wendy Griswold identified as the general concerns of contemporary Nigerian writers: stories of traditional village life, tales of the city, novels focusing on women's relationships with men, more or less formulaic romances, stories about intellectuals and academic life, novels treating the civil war, crime stories and thrillers and political novels.

Primarily, the text is a flashback that celebrates traditional village life with its inherent flaws just as it is a denunciation tale of the city. It is a text that explores women's relationships with men: a type stripped of western glamour that is more or less the standard romance stories found amongst

intellectuals. The reason for this is because academics are largely absent in Graceland. The text draws inspiration from the callousness of the calamitous Nigerian civil war in a way that suggests that the present political situation in the country is forever tied to its past. In essence, Chris Abani opines that today is the manifestation of yesterday's evil despite the fact that it is a new dawn. Graceland, above all, is a thriller that brings attention to crimes perpetuated by the custodians of social ethos with impunity. This is the tragedy of the post colony since the failures of the leaders translate to the lack of effective moral guardians in society.

Therefore in spite of the "new directions" that Heather Hewett and Tanure Ojaide postulate, there are some common current that runs in the text of Chris Abani and the literary generations before him. Significantly, this is found in the disillusionment and gloom that typify the works of first generation Nigerian writers, which echo through the landscapes of Graceland. On the other hand, the type of patriotism that pervades the works of the second-generation Nigerian writers is largely absent in the text because of the absence of a positive collective consciousness. Joanna Sullivan (2001) defines collective consciousness as "a distinctive set of values, tensions, myths, and psychological foci" (p.74)[9]. In Graceland, what is common to the characters is that which destroys them systematically.

[9] Sullivan, Joanna. (2001). The Question of a National Literature for Nigeria. *Research in African Literature*. Vol. 32 (3), 74p

Chris Abani's immediate predecessors advocate the "survival and unity of the Nigerian nation", but Graceland finds impetus in Elvis' declaration: "…why don't we revolt and overthrow this government?" (p.281). This act of desperation is informed by another form of patriotic sentiments:

> " … de majority of our people are honest, hardworking people. But dey are at the mercy of dese army bastards and dose tiefs in the IMF, de World Bank and de US" (p.280).

What stands out in the King's words and those of Elvis, which was quoted above, is the fact that the liberation struggle, today, is not just against foreign colonial masters, but also against fellow Africans who are the ultimate torturers of a people's psyche. In the present circumstance, pain is what defines the post colony's humanity:

> He didn't struggle against the pain anymore. It was part of him now. It seemed like he couldn't remember a time when it was not here. It had become essential to him. As long as he was in pain, he was still human (p.294).

Like the forerunners of the third generation of Nigerian writers, who bestride the latter years of the second generation and the early years of the third, there is a sense of social disjuncture in Graceland. However, while the subject matter of those that came before Chris Abani may not be necessarily deviant, Graceland, contrarily, prospers from a sustained defiance: Graceland does not

preach the unity of Nigeria. Instead, it plays up the fractured identity of the country as dubiously created by imperialist interests. Above all, it thrives by its manipulation of the ethnic factors that have persistently prevented the development of a national consciousness. As a result, the idea that the nation is an ambivalent metaphor is what stands out in the text. And, the wholesomeness of the undefiled nature of the ethnic Igbo world is celebrated, which is encapsulated in this cocky proclamation: "There is only one history: Igbo" (p.299). With this, Chris Abani submits that the Igbo society, unlike the idea of the nation, is progressive by design since the custom acknowledges that: "… there are things that cannot be contained, even in ritual…. That is the joy of life" (p.298).

Away from the thematic fraternity, there is further similarity in terms of Graceland's stylistic features that provoke a sense of continuity from the trends present in the works of the group of writers whose creativity blossomed between 1971 and 1983.

Stylistically, the text is founded on Wendy Griswold's theory that "the presence of tradition and modernity are an imperative" in the literary works of Nigeria. However, unlike the sensibility that informed the first generation works, what motivates the third generation of Nigerian writers as suggested by Chris Abani's text is the need for a counter force aimed at checkmating the influx and overwhelming presence of popular cultures that are the new form of colonialism in the 21st century. Besides, just like the writers of the second generation, Chris Abani tends to be experimentalist by

creating a new narrative form that takes into cognizance the predicament of the new African: the admixture of cultures finds expression in the parallel stories that Graceland tells – one is traditionally anthropological; the other is contemporary. One exudes nostalgia fanned by memories of a peaceful innocent season; the other is wrapped with the intricate complexities of an evil world. Nonetheless, the two worlds that Chris Abani replicates in Graceland are forward looking as this passage illustrates:

> *For the Igbo, tradition is fluid, growing. It is an event, like the sunset, or rain, changing with every occurrence. So too, the kola ritual has changed. Christian prayers have been added, and Jesus has replaced Obasi as the central deity. But its fluid aspects resist the empiricism that is the Western way, where life is supposed to be a system of codes, like the combinations of human DNA or the Fibonacci patterns in nature. The Igbo are not reducible to a system of codes, and of meaning; this culture is always reaching for a pure lyric moment* (p.291)

This intrinsic movement in the narrative demonstrates what Ayo Mamudu (1991) and John Hawley (2006) have described, respectively, as the "swings"[10] between two extremes and a "dynamic [which] becomes the central structural device".[11] With a subject matter that oscillates between two

[10] Mamudu, Ayo. (1991). Portrait of a Young Artist in Ben Okri's Landscapes Within. *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* [Dijon], 13(2), 85-91p.
[11] Hawley, John C. Ben Okri's Spirit-Child: Abiku Migration and Postmodernity [online]. Retrieved 24 July 2006 from http://www.ebcohost.com/humanities.html

cultural ideologies, and with a structure that is informed by the nature of the subject matter, Graceland does not only show that the younger generation of Nigerian writers, as argued by Olatubonsun Ogunsanwo, "are now becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the linear, scientific, imprisoned, tight mean-spirited, and unsatisfactory description of reality and human beings"[12], but that this generation is able to adroitly fluctuate between what is "overt politics" and the "politics of the interior". As a result, what is obtainable in Graceland is the tale of the Nigerian nation, which one cannot truthfully write about without a sense of violence.[13]

However, Graceland constantly uses dialectics to recount the drama of the Nigerian people. In the text, the author develops his story around the consequences of activities by the predominantly absent "crooked politicians, criminal soldiers, bent contractors, and greedy oil-company executives" (p.8), but Elvis, Redemption and King of de Beggars embody conscience that is informed by a political consciousness driven by a passionate involvement in the goings-on in their community. This is the condition in the postcolonial African state today: the leaders and their cohorts strangulate the nation while the led are the ones largely engaged in the act of exorcising the demons in the land by interrogating the nation while forging a path that would ring in, in some form, a new liberated society. This situates Graceland in the same ambience, which older Nigerian

[12] Ogunsanwo, Olatubonsun. Intertexuality and Post-Colonial Literature in Ben Okri's The Famished Road [online]. *Research in African Literatures*. Retrieved 24 July 2006 from http://www.ebcohost.com/humanities.html
[13] Jane Wilkinson, ed. Talking With African Writers, (London: Heinemann, 1992) p.81

writers have found one another. This is in line with the position of Abiola Irele (1981), when he states: "the outstanding attribute of the modern African writer is his immediate engagement with history."[14] This quality confirms the author's literary lineage.

The older Nigerian writers also engage in the crossing of boundaries like Chris Abani. But, they differ from the younger writer, whose "condition of transculturality" is like an obsession constantly in search of new ways of expression. The concerns of the two generations before his revolve around the condition of the post colony primarily because, according to Chinua Achebe as cited by Abiola Irele (1981), "the colonial departure from the scene was not really a departure." This event, therefore, means that independence was utopian. Resultantly, in their quest to correct this anomaly, they appropriate a narrative with a structural movement and figurative expressions that evoke the imagery of a fluid interlocutor, whose conversation with the agency of colonisation and the harbingers of independence is in the realm of transcendental politics – a condition that I define as a political experience that acknowledges the duality of the human psyche: the capacity to be both spiritual and mundane, simultaneously, in the political realm. In Graceland, Chris Abani's "state of endless crossing of boundaries" goes beyond that. He is not just crossing boundaries in

[14] Irele, Abiola (1981) Parables of the African Condition: A Comparative Study of Three Post-Colonial Novels. *Journal of African and Comparative Literature*, 69 – 91p.

spiri-cultural and geo-political terms, but in the text, the textist explores transmogrification as the passages below reveal:

> Elvis longed to try on their makeup and have his hair plaited. Aunt Felicia finally gave into his badgering and wove his hair into lovely cornrows. One of the girls put lipstick on him. Giggling, and getting into the game, another pulled a minidress over his head. On Elvis, it fell nearly to the floor, like an evening gown. He stepped into a pair of Aunt Felicia's too-big platforms and pranced about, happy, proud, chest stuck out (p.61).

> There were several young boys, however, who sang soprano parts. They also played the female roles in the play that was always part of the performance. There were five of them, aged between nine and fifteen, and they were all nondescript, bar one. Esau, the oldest, had a certain air to him that marked him apart. He was stunningly handsome. But what really set him apart was the grace with which he carried himself. When he was dressed in full drag, he made more than a few heads turn longingly, including some of the musicians who knew he was a man (p.277).

Transmogrification is defined as the process of changing somebody or something completely, especially in a surprising way.[15] The first excerpt shows that transmogrification does not only toy with the idea of a playful cross-dressing, it insinuates homosexuality that is the theme the second excerpt explores.

[15] Wehmeier, Sally. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.* 6th ed. 2001

The metamorphosis of Sunday after the destruction of Maroko is another dimension of transmogrification, which is peculiar to Chris Abani:

> Grabbing a cutlass Comfort had dropped earlier, Sunday sprang with a roar at the 'dozer. The policeman let off a shout and a shot, and Sunday fell in a slump before the 'dozer, its metal threads cracking his chest like a timber box as it went straight into the wall of his home. Sunday roared, leapt out of his body and charged at the back of the policeman, his paw delivering a fatal blow to the back of the policeman's head. With a rasping cough, Sunday disappeared into the night (p.287).

Another way in which Graceland explores the crossing of boundaries is through the dialogue between the dead Beatrice and Sunday. A ghost as a character is unique in its signification:

> "Sunday, don't be afraid."
>
> "Why not? You're a ghost. Have you come to kill me?"
>
> Beatrice smiled sweetly, and something about the smile sent shivers down his spine (p.285)

This line of argument continues between Sunday and the ghost of his dead wife, which has crossed over to the world of the living in order for the conversation to take place:

> He turned back to where Beatrice had been sitting. She was still there, but there was another presence too.
>
> You are not really hear," he told her.
>
> "Oh yes I am – and so is he," she said, pointing to a leopard curled up in the shadows.
>
> "What is dis? Did you bring a spirit leopard to kill me?"
>
> "No. He is here on his own."
>
> "But what is dis?"
>
> "I am the totem of your forefathers (p.286)

In this conversation, Graceland synchronises ancient beliefs with the new challenges of modernity. With the older writers, we come face to face with daemons, spirits and the ancestors in their texts. But for Chris Abani, the ghost makes a triumphant entry in an attempt aimed at the development of the character, Sunday. Its presence apparently provokes fear in Sunday just like an encounter with a daemon and a spirit would do in Amos Tutuola's evil forest, but Beatrice is emblematic of a good spirit, not the malevolent one. In like manner, the totem is the daemon and the ancestor by configuration. With these equations, Chris Abani shares with the older generations of Nigerian writers certain postmodernist attributes by defying conventions and crossing the boundaries between history and fiction, and, by extension, between life and art.

In analysing how postmodernism manifests itself in most of postcolonial fiction, Stephen Slemon (1989) states:

> … it is enormously self-reflexive and ironic; it draws obviously and excessively on the devices of 'fiction' to demystify imperialist versions of 'history'; it 'uses and abuses' the received codes of popular culture in order to effect a serious intervention in the Production and circulation of majority opinion.[16]

The world, which Graceland portrays, is fragmented and it is the celebration of the hybridised African weighed down by the aftermath of colonisation and the imposition of a selfish indigenous elite, which is an experience inflicted on him by neo-colonialism. But, while Chinua Achebe and his peers, first and foremost, make the decanonisation of Western culture and ideology their primary pre-occupation by using fiction to demystify imperialist version of history before assuming the position of the gadfly in their society, Chris Abani's mission is to decentre and decanonise the old guards of Nigerian Literature by, first, engaging in a practice that seeks to break up what Olatubonsun Ogunsanwo believes is the "the stable synthesis of the realistic text [by] producing a heightened disorientation between art and the social world." Therefore, by discarding their belief systems and entrenching the new, more overwhelming perception of reality, which he finds truly disturbing – a festered decay of the polity, which is causing insanity in contemporary society –

[16] Slemon, Stephen (1989). Modernism's Last Post. *Ariel,* 20 (4), 3-17pp.

Chris Abani makes vivid this deprivation. Graceland, as a result, conjures a frightening image of the post-colony by showing, through Elvis, that the nation state is in a state of near hopelessness:

> He concentrated really hard to try and recall up an image of his mother. The only one that came up was of her standing over him in her garden, the sun behind her, a tall, dark, smiling presence (p.104).

The imagery the passage conjures is not wholesome or desirable: the mother image suggestive of Nigeria, in this case, is a dark presence. This is because she is not facing the sun, which is the source of light and life. These characteristics depict the presence of a void in the life of the new African, who is struggling to recall the beauty and the significance of the motherland. And, to find meaning in life, Chris Abani makes Elvis to find a form of distraction with an important effect: "Not wanting to miss anything, he returned his attention to Oye [Elvis' grandmother] and her story" (p.104). Thus, through Oye and Elvis, Graceland employs and abuses, also, the received codes of popular culture in order to affect a serious intervention that aims at ridiculing society. Besides, it uses this as a means of engineering a rebirth of a fractured, dying nation by drawing attention to the fact that the present, continuous state of the post-colony leaves a permanent feeling of great sadness and mental pain in the new patriots, whose nationalism is not prompted by the desire to exhale the West from their consciousness:

> He closed the book and imagined what kind of scar that would leave. It would be a thing alive that reached up to the sky in supplication, descending to root itself in the lowest chakra, our basest nature. Until the dead man became the sky, the tree, the earth and the full immeasurable sorrow of it all. He knew that scar, that pain, that shame, that degradation that no metaphor could contain, inscribing it on his body. And yet beyond that, he was that scar, carved by hate and smallness and fear onto the world's face. He and everyone like him, until the earth was aflame with scarred black men dying in trees of fire (p.319-320).

Chris Abani further benefits from works before him through his continuous exploration of the youthful protagonist. From Chinua Achebe to Wole Soyinka; from Wole Soyinka to Kole Omotoso and Isidore Okpewho; from this duo to Festus Iyayi and Ben Okri, there has been a consistent reliance on the youthful character by Nigerian writers to develop and carry forward the Nigerian story, which they narrate. S.K. Desai (1981) explains the significance of this character choice:

> The concept of the child as manifested in the African stories is what one might say, modern. The child is no Romantic angel; he is a raw soul, a bundle of impulses, sensations, emotions and perceptions, facing life, struggling to comprehend it, trying to piece together his fragmentary experiences; he is a complex being with an uninformed mind, often more complex than the adult, subjected to an unpredictable process of growth (p. 45).[17]

[17] Mandras, Narasimhaiah. (ed) (1981). *Commonwealth Literature, Problems of Response,* India, Macmillan

In Graceland, Elvis exhibits these qualities. He is definitely no Romantic angel. Therefore, he comes to the reader as a creation with his baggage: raw, impulsive, sensational, emotional and highly perceptive. His declaration, "I have a bit of ethical dilemma" (p.96), sums up the fact that Elvis is "a mess of conflicting emotions" (p.51) as the narrator points out. In the narrative, he faces life struggling to sew together the many pieces that should help him find understanding and embrace the full essence of life. His complexity as a round character is heightened by his ignorance and naivety. Consequently, what he becomes in the mind's eye is a character "subjected to an unpredictable process of growth". He wavers in his convictions and this usually leaves him "rooted to the spot, staring" (p.74) while evil triumphs in the text.

In him, one sees Nigeria grow, metaphorically, as a character full of foibles, incoherencies and inconsistencies. As a result, Elvis' life becomes the tapestry that helps ingrain the Nigerian nation, its idiosyncrasy and its absurdity into the reader's consciousness. What is obvious in the text is a "disoriented and disturbed" (p.65) personage, who is not oblivious of his responsibilities to society, but has decidedly failed to stand up to the plate because of his moral weakness and indecisive nature. The King of de Beggars says: "Only you [Elvis] can choose" (p.96). Redemption reaffirms this position again, using the same expression: "… you must choose" (p.140). As a result, here lies the core of Graceland's moral discourse, which is a condition that makes it an ideological project.

Chris Abani introduces Elvis as a sixteen-year-old two years after his father migrated to Lagos with him. However, his story actually started as a five year old in Afikpo, two years after the Nigerian Civil War. In essence, the numeral (2), and the ideas associated with it in the character development of Elvis, appropriates a symbolism that sheds light on the psychological composition of the character. And, the Bessie Head statement that opens Book I in Graceland echoes its relevance: "so vast had his inner perceptions grown over the [two] years …"(p.1).

Elvis was born in 1967, which was the year the Nigerian Civil War started. The war ended in 1970. The implication of this is that during the first three years of his existence on earth, Elvis came face to face with palpable danger and the shooting pain of war. Being an Igbo – the very ethnic group that was the belligerent party pitched against the rest of Nigeria – living in Afikpo situated him at the very heart of the imbroglio, which is both a social and political crisis. Therefore, innocence was alien to him at a tender age since it had taken flight in the young nation, where nature had thrust him. Thus, two years into the real world, Elvis adequately understands the full impact of the war:

> Innocent, at fifteen, was Elvis's eldest cousin. Elvis knew that Innocent had been a boy soldier in the civil war … and that when Innocent slept over at Elvis's house, he woke up in the middle of the night, screaming. Oye told him that Innocent screamed because of the ghosts of those he had killed in the war were tormenting him (p.20).

Innocence was lost to Innocent. And, in the context of Graceland, it is fair to regard him as the tangible form, a personification of the quandary that Elvis and Nigeria are exposed to since the story of the one is the plight of the other. Consequently, the prismatic nature of Elvis' perception of reality as a child carves in his memory very bright and clear gory tales, which make a child grow swiftly into an adolescent and, then, leap quickly into an arena that is the preserve of adults.

As a child crossing the boundaries separating him from adolescence, Elvis is already well acquainted with the challenges prevalent in the precarious world that forms the very centre of adult life in Nigeria. As a result, he has to latch on to anything that gives him hope. Sadly, like his country, he is prone to making wrong choices. After all, his ultimate exit into exile may be a wrong choice as well because just like when he first arrived in Lagos, it would be "difficult to engage fully with the reality around him" (p.8) as an exile.

Lastly, another Chris Abani's similarity with the older generation of Nigerian writers is in the area of intertexuality and its application in Graceland. According to J.A. Cuddon (1999), intertexuality "denote[s] the interdependence of literary texts, the interdependence of any one literary text with all those that have gone before it" (p.424). What this implies is that a literary text is not an isolated phenomenon; it is made up of a mosaic of quotation, and that any text is the absorption and

transformation of another. In Graceland, there are ample allusions to previous texts from Nigeria and the West, specifically Shakespeare and the Bible.

The "Slow and steady…" (p.83), amongst other didactic expressions written on the frames of trucks, brings to mind similar slogans on same types of lorry in Chinua Achebe's textette, Eze Goes to School. And, the African version of the "Ides of March" from Shakespeare's Macbeth becomes glaring to the reader as one reads:

> They were waltzing, and gracefully. Beautiful black dancers, stapled to wooden crosses that pulled them upright and stiff like marionettes; a forest of Pinocchios, waltzing mug trees, marching like Macbeth's mythical forest (p.87).

One more classic that Chris Abani uses to enrich his work is Mabel the Sweet Honey that Poured Away (p.123). This is a reincarnated title from the Onitsha Market Literature, a set of works that Graceland says, "were morality tales with their subject matter and tone translated straight out of the oral culture" (p.112). Graceland does not end here in terms of intertextuality. Gracefully, it alludes to the words of Pontius Pilate, when the multitude brought Jesus Christ before him: "I wash my hands off you, like Pilate" (p.131), says Sunday. And by adding "… I don't blame you", Elvis' father echoes Pilate in Matthew 27 verse 23, when the Roman king declares: "Why, what evil hath he

done?"[18] This suggests that Christ is simply a just man whose fate was not the consequence of his direct action: Jesus Christ had to die because a greater power had determined his destiny. Between Sunday and his son, Elvis, "everything … fell apart when [Beatrice] died" (p.131). This signifies that some metaphysical forces have imposed their predicament on them. The phrase, "fell apart", is another reference to Chinua Achebe. What I consider the most striking and enduring image in Graceland springs from Chris Abani's borrowing of Athol Fugard's Sizwe Bansi is Dead. Elvis, who has been stripped of any nuance of human dignity, has to lose his identity by appropriating the identity of a not too decent man in order to regain his self-esteem. This is what Chris Abani ends the story he narrates with.

Graceland's use of intertextuality is a telltale, which illuminates the truth that the generations before the author are his kindred spirits. However, he is not paying homage to them blindly through what David Lodge (1986) describes as a "synthesis of pre-existing narrative traditions" (p.4). This is because Chris Abani recognises the fact that for him to be meaningful to the generation(s) he speaks to, he has to jettison the cloak of the past and put on a new identity that should enable him regain what has been lost, albeit with a multiplicity of tongues; in this case, the assumption of the many literary traditions in one composition.

[18] Holy Bible, King James Version, (Nashville, Tennessee: Boardman & Holman, 1979) p.21

In as much as the closing scene in Graceland calls attention to a frightening nature of the post-colony in the 21st century, in which the citizens are willing to abdicate their responsibilities to their fatherland and abrogate the rights that tie them to their nation by absconding to foreign lands, its overarching import is captured in Henry Louis Gates' article, "Between the Living and the Unborn" when the renowned critic declared: "[I] n an era of literary innovation … boundaries exist to be trespassed, conventions to be defied…"[19] Through this tradition, transculturality expresses itself firmly in the sense that in Graceland two main narrative modes emerge broadly and these modes take on parallel status, which then creates both narrative and cultural interdiscursivity in the text.

[19] Henry Louis Gates (1992), Between the Living and the Unborn. ***The New York Times Book Review*** 28 June 1992, p3.

CHAPTER THREE

Structure and Characterisation as Aesthetics

In this chapter I argue that Chris Abani's manner of engineering the structure of Graceland and his method of developing some of the characters in the text, especially Elvis, are a metaphor with neurological implications. His eclectic use of symbolism to describe the life of a nation – this study looks at Nigeria as a character as well – tortured by neurological disorders separates him from other Nigerian writers, who simply employ allegory to re-enact the contemporary Nigerian tragedy. Stepping away from an allegorical representation of a country that devours its own, Chris Abani responds artistically to the Nigerian dilemma by using some insidious literary devices to dramatise the problematic. Therefore, it is not just his peculiar use of neurological metaphor that marks out his narrative, but also his deft and subtle application of literary devices that are not found commonly in Nigeria's literature. These are informed by modernism.

Graceland is a modernist novel. Chris Abani is influenced by modernism because, in its structure, Graceland breaks away from established conventions, which have defined the novel as a literary form. Basically, it ruptures the traditional basis of western art by adopting what J.A. Cuddon (1999) states is the "fresh ways of looking at man's position and function in the universe and many (…

remarkable) experiments in form and style" (p.516). According to him, modernism is particularly concerned with language and how to use it.

Chris Abani's Graceland, no doubt, experiments in form and style: in terms of form, as stated earlier in the first chapter, Graceland as a narrative is non-linear. Other aspects that make the form in Graceland unique as experiment are: First, every chapter ends with a type of recipe for a traditional cuisine, medication or prayer (Islam (p.59), Christianity (p.171). On one occasion, the chapter ends with an Onitsha market literature excerpt (p.123); and, then, two parallel stories open every chapter: one tells the story of the kola nut and its significance in the Igbo cosmology while the other is the contemporary tale of Graceland. In accordance with the tradition of structuralist narratology, a meaning develops from these patterns that weave together the various parts that make up the structure of the text: the structure amplifies the conflict that exists in the body polity. And, in terms of language style, Graceland uses language in an exceptionally representational way, which is made manifest through its reliance on rare figures of speech like amplification, ploce, chosism, defamiliarisation, binary opposition, decadence, philistinism, anamnesis, psychomachy and in medias res.

These approaches mark Chris Abani out as an expressionist writer in Graceland. Expressionist writers, according to a study by J.A. Cuddon (1999) undertake to express a personal vision of a

human life and human society by embodying violent extremes of mood and feeling (p.62). This private mental picture is in consonance with what Charles E. Bressler (1994) argues New Historicism advocates, which is that: “all history is subjective, written by people whose personal biases affect their interpretation of the past” (p.128). Therefore, whatever a text chronicles is not objective history. This implies that Graceland, in spite of the presence of some identifiable historical events and personages, is better read as subjective history: a simple work of art with ample elements of personal biases that propel its final outcome towards the personal vision of the narrator: the writer.

Graceland depicts a period in the life of the Nigerian society spanning between 1972 and 1983. However, there is an occasional flashback to the years of the Nigerian Civil War. The text captures the environment and social dialectics of the time through the actions of Elvis that are responses succinctly portraying the fact that lives and actions are determined by environment. In other words, Graceland thrives on the theory of New Historicism that argues that there is an elaborate relationship between text and society. This is because the text performs what is regarded (Cuddon, 1999) as an “autopsy on life” (p.538). One way it does this is by focussing excessively on the seamier aspects of human existence, which is made concrete and intense through a detailed depiction of the ugly and the diseased in contemporary society. Chris Abani’s choice of words and, sometimes, pace create tension in the text. This, in turn, gives an insight into how the third

generation writer attempts to interact with the moment in which he lives in and translate this defining period in the post-colony to posterity. Chris Abani's "fresh way of looking at man's position in the universe" is what Heather Hewett (2005) describes as evocative of Ayi Kwei Armah's The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born and Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night. And, it is because "Abani invests heavily in a scatological portrayal of reality…with considerable narrative brio." [20] The consequence of this reality is what Dinaw Mengestu (2004) in his review of Graceland conjures when he says that:

> A cruel indifference to human life breeds the collective resignation of a people who know all too well how capricious the difference between living and dying can be.[21]

What emerges out of this technique, however, is that Graceland provokes the interrogation of the self and society. At the centre of this is the re-examination of the values that define the essence of being or humanity. Elvis encapsulates this idea when the self-conscious narrator[iv] states that:

> Elvis smoked quietly. The King's warnings about Redemption played through his head. While he was tempted to beg for a second chance, he didn't want to live with Redemption's criminal side. It was too dangerous.

[20] Heather Hewett. (2005) Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the voice of the third generation. *English in Literature*. Vol.32, (1): 73 – 98p.
[21] Mengestu, Dinaw. (2004) At the end of lonely street (Graceland – Book Review)" ***The New Leade****r,* Jan-Feb 2004, 27(2).

> What was it Oye used to say? If one finger is smeared with palm oil, it soon stains the others. With surprise he realised that he had not thought of Oye, or his mother, for so long. Was he getting too sucked into life in Lagos? (p.136)

In other words, Lagos, one of the settings in Graceland, is a vacuity. This image of a vacuum suggests the emptiness that characterises society, which has been severed from its roots and spiritual essence by the prevailing conditions in the post colony.

The multifarious interests and conflicts that are interlocked in this social saga that Graceland recreates, albeit subjectively, make the text an engaging, creative piece of literature that proclaims emphatically that the post-colonial gaze now transcends canonical writers and their literary identities in terms of subject matter and techniques. Heather Hewett (2005) submits in her study that:

> With Chris Abani … there is a shift from the postcolonial concern of blame to the inner, transcultural one within the African socio-political setup. [Thus, Graceland does] not 'write back' to the Empire in the classic fashion of postcolonial textualities. Rather, [it] focuses on Nigeria as a cultural, transnational and hybridised space...[22]

[22] Heather Hewett. (2005) Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the voice of the third generation. *English in Literature*. Vol.32, (1): 73 – 98p.

In other words, the art of Nigerian writers has redefined itself despite the fact that it still enmeshes a reader in familiar themes that have run through Nigerian Literature since the time of the harbingers of the nation's literary traditions. And, the "hybridised space" is given a new significance by the form of the text as stated on p.19 of this research report: Fundamentally, Graceland is the amalgamation of various narrative traditions, cultural beliefs and opposing thematic concerns. But, above all, it is the fact that Chris Abani uses language uniquely that sets Graceland apart in its quest to shift the literary traditions of three generation of Nigerian writings: If Chinua Achebe was the master narrator, who has made the beauty of simplicity iconoclastic, then Chris Abani is the master painter. As an adroit descriptive writer, he pays attention to details and recreates sordidness and violence with a keen visual clarity. This he condenses into a haunting image as the following text reveals:

> The bulldozer lumbered closer to the barrier. Even though it was beginning to skew slightly, some of the men looked worriedly at Sunday. But swallowing their bristly fear, they stood their ground. Sunday tried to smile reassuringly at them, but sweat on his forehead belied it. He noted the bulldozer's approach warily and glanced at Freedom from the corner of his eye. Freedom stood there without fear, a curious smile playing at the edge of his lips. He was either very confident or mad (p.269).

This highly personal attribute of the writer is informed by what I have described earlier (p.19) as reliance on rare figures of speech. The effect, which these haunting images elicit, is thus heightened in the reader's consciousness through the use of amplification. The excerpt from Graceland in the previous page, through the use of adjectives that paint a provocative eeriness, insinuates this device in which language is used to extend or magnify or emphasise.

Furthermore, Chris Abani articulates some of the sentiments John Osborne's Look Back in Anger expresses. One of such is the feeling, which J.A. Cuddon (1999) describes as that of "a generation of disillusioned and discontented young [people] who [are] strongly opposed to the social and political attitudes, mores, and indeed to the whole 'bourgeois ethic of the establishment'" (p. 40). To show the extent of deprivation in society, and the intensity of required deprecation of the prevailing condition of the hapless citizens of the post colony, Chris Abani carefully uses certain words prominently and repeatedly in the first three chapters to a telling effect. "Rust/rusty", "smell", and "tenement" conjure fickleness, decay, stench and poverty. With these, among others, he foretells the world within the "slime-covered walls" (p.6) of Graceland. This is the purpose of ploce, which is a figurative device in which the same word (or words) is repeated. By constantly repeating certain words, particular ideas and imagery populate a reader's consciousness. With this, Graceland succeeds in creating the atmosphere that is breathtakingly oppressive, denigrating, suffocating and depressingly hazy.

For instance, the opening words in Graceland is figurative in intent and purpose – besides announcing the thematic concerns of the text, it strongly evokes the image of a frustrated person trapped and oppressed, but who is yearning to set himself free against all odds:

> Elvis stood by the open window. Outside: heavy rain. He jammed the wooden shutter open with an old radio battery, against the wind. The storm drowned the tinny sound of the portable radio on the table. He felt claustrophobic, fingers gripping the iron of the rusty metal protector. It was cool on his lips, chin and forehead as he pressed his face against it (p.3).

Words like "jammed", "against", "drowned", "claustrophobic", "gripping" and "pressed" create a picture that is utterly unpleasant and, definitely, emasculating. This situation becomes more painful because one is a prisoner in one's house or country. Paradoxically, this is the very condition that foments a rebellious spirit in the citizen of a postcolonial African state.

By repeating the word "tenement" most times in the text – pp. 6, 26, 51 and 252 – Chris Abani is calling attention to the squalid state in which majority of the people in the post colony now find themselves in spite of the promises of independence. The vivid image that emerges in Graceland is that of lack. For instance, Chris Abani defines tenement as "a squat bungalow with rooms built

around a paved courtyard" (p.51). "Squat", in this case, means "not attractive". In another instance, through metaphor, the author creates a picture evoking wrenching hunger, which leaves one salivating without the possibility of satisfying the need of the palate. In a more direct way, it means that living in a poor area comes with physical discomfort:

> The road outside their tenement was waterlogged and the dirt had been whipped into a muddy brown froth that looked like chocolate frosting (p.6).

This chronic atmosphere, which pervades the entire text, is made so tangible through the use of chosis, which is a figure of speech that allows the writer to give a highly detailed description of things and, often, inanimate objects. It emphasises their shape, colour, texture and density as in the following:

> But the sun stabbed through the thin fabric, bathing the room in sterile light (p.4).

> The stretch of broken asphalt yawned in the midday heat. Houses on either side crowded together as if to revive it (p.143).

> Taps stood in yards, forlorn and lonely, their curved spouts, like metal beaks, dripping rainwater (p.3).

In giving human attribute to the sun, the broken asphalt, the houses, and the taps by imbuing in them a miserable condition, the text effectively manipulates the emotions of the reader thereby turning sympathy to hatred for the silent elites in the corridors of power in the postcolony: poverty is not just for the human; steel and earth feel and know the lack in the land. It is this horrendous condition, which suffuses the land that the text reinvents in another form when Graceland declares that:

> …the smell of garbage from refuse dumps, unflushed toilets and stale bodies was still overwhelming (p.4).

The "threadbare curtain" that separates the citizens of the postcolonial state from the "oppressive heat that had already dropped like a blanket over [the land]" does not shade them away from the pain that already resides inside them. As revealed in the passage below, pain and want are individualised, and the two conditions live in the psyche of the people:

> Elvis turned from the window, dropping the threadbare curtain. Today was his sixteenth birthday, and as with all the others, it would pass uncelebrated (p.4).

This loneliness that consumes joyous moments further heightens the sense of social dislocation and apparent disjuncture in the postcolonial state.

Chosism, on the other hand, evokes defamiliarisation, which is a technique that modifies a reader's habitual perception by drawing attention to the artifice of the text. Therefore, what the reader notices is not the picture of reality that is being presented but the peculiarities of the language itself. This is achieved by making fresh and strange what is familiar and known (Cuddon, 1999: 214).

Chris Abani accomplishes this by using an idiosyncratic language in Graceland. Uniquely Nigerian, this identity is achieved through a creative application of twang that infuses the entire text with an aura that is refreshingly strange to a non-West African reader. This is because the text is a potpourri of the variety of English language known to the Nigerian people, which Graceland employs for strategic reason. The narrator, whose voice is, also, projected through Elvis' utterances, uses the Standard English as his primary vehicle of communication. Thus, on one hand, the language of the text is universal, a condition that situates it within the ambit of world literature. However, in order to express human truth and illustrate human experience in its distinctiveness while immersing the characters in Graceland in the particularities of history since there is an elaborate relationship between text and society, Chris Abani has to embrace every fine distinction in the linguistic output of the history Graceland recreates by utilising a brand of English with a tinge. Thus, the hallmark of Graceland's language is the Pidgin English, a lyrical variety that Ken Saro-Wiwa celebrates in Sozaboy, which of course, is different from Amos Tutuola's

transliteration influenced English. Basically, Graceland's typical language is made more definite by what Jeyifo (1988) calls "the assumed popular vintage [with the] clarity and simplicity of diction and expression [which is a] reaction to the pedantic, academic and esoteric" (p.289). This "pedantic, academic and esoteric" type is the language largely associated with previous generations of Nigerian writers. This popular vintage is an ideal for Graceland because Chris Abani tells the story of the dregs of the Nigerian society using their voices, not the voice of the rarefied elites.

Consequently, language in Graceland is largely demotic. It is the language of the common people and it accentuates the novel's dialectical form: language, as used in Graceland, is a dialysis of sorts because as a means of self-expression, Austin Tamuno-Opubo George (2006) argues that language is considered a crucial arena of cultural and ideological struggle (p.107).[23] The significance of this is that the language in Graceland allows characters to speak "in their own voices and consciousness" in consonance with Bakhtin's liberated plurality of independent and unmerged voices.

The following extracts are an array of some of the distinct expressions, which show the social status of the characters and their level of education, especially. The first is by the madam of the local bar where Sunday and others "drown their sorrows in her watered-down alcohol" (p.52); the

[23] Tamuno-Opubo George, Austin (2006) Ken Saro-Wiwa's Art and the Aesthetic of Non-Silence. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Witwatersrand.

second passage is Elvis', who is a high-school drop out, and the last one are the words of a commuter on the bus Elvis was travelling by:

> "Em, Mr. Philanthropist, before you give anoder person drink, pay for de one you done drink" (p.52)
>
> "Why do we need to have soldiers there to tell us it is dangerous to cross the road? … if you cross the road without using the overhead bridges, you increase the chances of being hit by a car. Simple logic, really" (p.57).
>
> "Is dis your first day in Lagos? Dey are on strike or using de government ambulances as hearses in deir private business. Dis is de only country I know dat has plenty ambulances, but none in de hospitals or being used to carry sick people. One time, American reporter dey sick in Sheraton Hotel, so he call for de ambulance. De hospital tell him dat he must book in advance and dat de nearest available time is de following Tuesday. When de hotel staff insist, talk say de man was about to die, de ambulance department told dem dat dey only carry dead people for a fee as part of funeral processions. If de man was alive, dey suggest make de hotel rush him to de hospital by taxi …" (p.57).

The literary intent of this technique accounts for why none of the text's characters is subject to the authoritative control of the author. They are spontaneous and lithe as they confront the everyday challenges of their miserable lives as common people. As a result, in their ordinariness, they annihilate any form of alienation effect and it, then, becomes almost impossible to apply the rule of aesthetic distance because the genuine polyphony of fully valid voices drowns the loud but silent

voices of the bourgeoisie class represented by the Colonel. These are the real people identifiable in this narrative.

What this does to the conscientious reader is the fact that it announces loudly that the signifier of the langue in post-colonial societies in both economic and social terms is binary opposition. This, in turn, denotes that society is composed of two. Even in a politically liberated society like postcolonial African states, Graceland states that there are political and economic discriminations or disparities: the poor exist in the midst of plenty, which a few enjoy. These are, obviously, the antithesis of the things hoped for during the struggle for independence. This idea of binary opposition reveals a complex reality, which is the condition of the post-colony: there are the oppressors and the oppressed, and the rich and the poor. This landscape that Graceland paints lucidly emerges out of some of the expressions by the narrator as in the following pieces:

> Giving up on reading, he let his mind drift as he stared at the city, half slum, half paradise. How could a place be so ugly and violent yet beautiful at the same time? He wondered. … Lagos did have its fair share of rich people and fancy neighbourhoods, though, and since arriving he had found that one-third of the city seemed transplanted from the rich suburbs of the west. There were beautiful brownstones set in well-landscaped yards, sprawling Spanish-style haciendas in brilliant white and ochre, elegant Frank Lloyd Wright-styled buildings and cars that were new and foreign (pp. 7 – 8)

> As they drove off, Elvis watched the spreading fire through the tinted glass. It was horrifying, yet strangely beautiful (p.228)

Subtly though, the passage above highlights the distance that exits between the leaders, their agents and the ordinary citizenry. The "tinted glass" is a metaphor for the wall that separates and insulates the powerful people in society, and those in the corridors of power from the destruction that is eating up the post colonial state just like the "spreading fire". In the comfort of their world, they are cocooned from the intensity of the heat emanating from everyday challenges in the post colony.

Graceland also uses binary opposition to satirise. When one of the foreigners at the Bar Beach says, "He doesn't look like any Elvis I know" (p.12), the words are intended to basically lampoon the idea of imitation. It is comical as well. The impact of the west and its influences is not just offensive to the owners of the culture being imitated by the new Africans, but it is pitiable amongst scrupulous natives as suggested by " Who do dis to you?" (p.13), which is a honest inquiry that spells concern in the voice of a person the narrator describes as "a rather generously proportioned woman" who laughs at Elvis as she gets off the molue at the Bar Beach bus stop.

This is a striking deployment of abrogation, and its significance is that it serves as a metaphor. Through Elvis and the impersonation act, Graceland symbolically shows that it is difficult to sustain

a nation economically and culturally when the people of any community choose to embrace and live on alien source and its transient quality because it is not deep rooted in the psyche of the nation. As Graceland states:

> It was hard eking out a living as an Elvis impersonator, haunting markets and train stations, as invisible to the commuters or shoppers as a real ghost (p.13)

As a recurring symbol, binary opposition finds expression, also, through the use of philistinism, which the Colonel represents because of his devotion to money, material objects and the uncultured as the passage below reveals:

> People like de Colonel use their position to get human parts as you see and den freeze it. … Dey can use de eyes and also something dey call stem cell. Anyway, heart is also ten thousand. De oders, like kidney, are like three to ten thousand dollars. It is big money for de Colonel (p.242).

Despite the fact that Graceland indicates that the Colonel is engaged in an endless search for the beauty in death, it is obvious that the statement is a paradox since he has little concern for art of any kind, beauty or the nobler aspirations and achievements of mankind: his main interest is how to amass wealth through this dastardly act, which Redemption defines its purpose in the excerpt

above. This brings to bear on the reader the full impact of anamnesis since this technique encourages "the recollection of ideas, [specific] people or events (in a previous existence)."[24] The truth is that there is a huge similarity between the story Graceland enacts and the history of Nigeria, which is replete with comparable characters and events.

Therefore, Graceland allows the reader to situate himself in the real condition of the underdogs, whose every day lives the text explicates. Above all, students of history could easily identify specific events and personages, slightly distorted though, in the text as major characters in the drama, which is Nigeria. Thus, to an extent, one could argue that Graceland exhibits some features peculiar to the genre called faction, which Ernest Emenyonu (1991) defines as the "art of juxtaposing facts, real and identifiable, with fiction" (p.133).

Graceland, also, employs psychomachy. This device, to an extent, transfers from the realm of the text to the reader's world a battle for the human soul by contending virtues and vices or other external personae representing good and evil. This, no doubt, constantly leaves behind an uneasy sentiment in the reader's mind. One expression that elucidates this point is the one that presents the dilemma that Elvis faces as an individual struggling to stand up for the good by attempting to

[24] J.A. Cuddon, A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, (London: Penguin Books, 1999) 36

contain the many negative forces on the streets of the postcolonial state, including the beach where Elvis "practised his dance routines for hours to the sound of his little radio" (Abani:8):

> The beach was also refuge to the homeless beggars moved on by the police; always polite, they offered to share their 'tickets to paradise". Elvis always refused the marijuana, but the smell hung in the hot air, and it soon became difficult to engage fully with the reality around him (p.8).

Elvis is not alone in this passive consumption of the destructive substance, which is the very source of the social schizophrenia that is a sub-theme in the text. Other users are the faceless individuals that share the same space with him in the post colony.

The rivalry between the King and Redemption for the soul of Elvis emboldens this tussle between the forces of good and evil in Graceland. Elvis recognises this, and he declares this knowledge to Redemption when he says: "I know you are trying to help me, Redemption. But he is trying to save me" (Abani: 139). One can argue that what motivates the King in his attempt to protect Elvis from Redemption is because of the fact that the beggar perceives the street wise Redemption as a corrupting influence on Elvis. As a result, the King tells Elvis: "You need an alternative to de world dat Redemption is showing you" (p.131). On the other hand, an agitated Redemption counters the

King's position in his attempt, also, to protect Elvis from the king. This is evident in his words as he blusters:

> Well, what do you know about your saviour? Who is he? Where does he come from? Why is he willing to save you? Why can't he save himself from the street? Answer me! (p.139).

The dialogue that takes place between Elvis and Redemption immediately after this outburst questions the validity and objectivity of intentions in human relationships. Principally, it makes the point that people are selfish, and that no one is a saint because everyman has skeletons in his cupboard, which he strives to conceal. Besides, it suggests that no one should trust people easily, and that it is important to question motives:

> "Dis man who is trying to save you does not tell you about himself? And yet you say I want you to follow me blindly? You are already blind."
>
> "I know his name, and that he is part of a theatre group. I know that he got cut along the face while doing an antigovernment play-"
>
> "Dat scar on his face has been dere since I was small boy," Redemption interrupted.
>
> "What?"
>
> "Listen, Mr. Blind Man. I know dat beggar better dan you. He was my master one time."

> "Your master? I don't understand."
>
> "You are a small blind boy. Dere are many things you do not understand."
>
> "About what?"
>
> "Me. De King. Lagos. Life," Redemption said, sounding tired.
>
> "Then tell me. Why is everybody keeping secrets from me" Elvis asked (p.40).

Graceland positions the King as a father figure, and he may be read as the father Elvis does not have in his household in terms of father-son relationship. In furtherance of the competition between the King and Redemption, the latter, however, will not condone this bond:

> But dis I will tell you. De King is not your father, he cannot be, will not be (p.140).

Choosing the path to follow becomes a Herculean decision Elvis has to make. He is lost, just like the new African, who is caught between the values of the old and the new worlds. Formidable task as it is, it is an individual commission in spite of the crossroads on one's path. When the hapless Elvis says to Redemption, "Tell me what to believe" (Abani: 140), Redemption retorts:

> "Tell yourself. If you want to get involve in de job I told you, find me before next week. If not, den it is fine. But you must choose."
>
> "That is what the King told me," Elvis said.
>
> "Den maybe he is trying to save you after all" (p.140).

And, in Afikpo, before Elvis in Lagos had the temerity to tell his biological father that he never learned to respect him (Abani: 130), the reason why Sunday bellows, "No son of mine is going to grow up as a homosexual!" (p.62), is because Sunday has drawn the line between different sexualities: gay and straight. In Sunday's consciousness, the one is evil and the other is good. Therefore, it is an imperative to deliver his son from the grip of homosexuality, an evil force.

Another instance in Graceland that shows this battlefield for the human soul is the image of the road and the spirits dancing around the buses "trying to pluck plump offering [as] retribution for the sacrilege of the road" (Abani: 9). As a metaphor for the continuous existence of imperialist tendencies in the post-colony, Graceland argues that it is imperialism's collaboration with the black elites – the new custodians of the now independent African states – that makes it possible for the inhabitants of the postcolonial state to be torn between many influences. The text pontificates on the failure of Africa's new leaders through this metaphor since it is the governments' lackadaisical

policies that have left the societies in the post colony with no radar device that point to a meaningful, wholesome identity:

> Molues were buses unique to Lagos, and only that place could have devised such a hybrid vehicle, its "magic" the only thing keeping it from falling apart. The cab of the bus was imported from Britain, one of the Bedford series. The chassis of the body came from surplus Japanese army trucks trashed after the Second World War. The body was built from scraps of broken cars and discarded roofing sheets – anything that could be beaten into shape or otherwise fashioned. The finished product, with two black stripes running down a canary body, looked like a roughly hammered yellow sardine tin (p.9).

What emerges, metaphorically, from the picture that the text paints above is a post-colony that is not healthy and natural, and it is inhabited by a people severed from their traditional lifestyles, who are struggling with a strange way of life imposed on them by circumstances beyond their control. The act of superimposing asphalt on the dusty pathway is "the sacrilege of the road" (Abani: 9): it is a disconnect. The aftermath of this encounter is the emergence of a postcolonial state that relies on strange intangibles, which is "its magic" (Abani: 8), for its existence. Disheartening though, just like the molue, the new Africans who have embraced influences from both the west (Britain) and the east (Japan) are "trapped in an urban chaos that was frightening and confusing" (Abani: 9) just

like the "roughly hammered yellow sardine tin". This analogy invokes the one historical act performed by Lord Lugard in 1914, which historians call the amalgamation of Nigeria.

This "frightening and confusing" condition is emblematic of a polity that is in a schizophrenic state, and the root cause of this insalubrious condition is the fact that the new African has been severed from his traditional roots: now there is no authentic ties to the land, which should have been a positive influence on his life, mores and morality.

In putting on the panoply of the bildungsroman – a novel that is an account of the youthful development of a hero or heroine – Graceland describes the process by which Elvis and every child in Graceland achieve maturity through the various ups and downs in their lives. However, the use of in medias res as a narrative technique through the text's oscillation between the pastoral and the metropolitan, brings to the fore Chris Abani's belief in the idea that the past and the present are interwoven in what I dare call the *danse macabre* of the post-colony. Thus, the transformation of Innocence at war as a child soldier is a metaphor:

> Even though the enemy had been responsible for this massacre, Innocent knew the rebels weren't much better. He had long since lost any belief in the inherent goodness of the rebel cause and the evil of the enemy. Once he had been driven by deep idealism. Now he just wanted to survive. He had seen Captain commit enough atrocities to realise that they were all infected by insanity of blood fever (p.211).

The swinging between Nigeria's historical and traditional past and its present, and the alternate crossing from Afikpo to Lagos and a seemingly fluid movement into Ibare, Abeokuta and Ijebu, is a definitive metaphoric statement on the nature of the post-colonial state as well. The past, which is Afikpo, "held water cooled by the earth and enriched by the sweet herbs … dropped into it daily" (Abani: 35). Consequently, it represents the pristine African nation, which is also a metaphor for the pre-colonial state, in its richness. On the other hand, the nation in its present state, which Lagos typifies, is the epitome of the after effect of its contact with contaminating influences:

> Half the town was built of a confused mix of clapboard, wood, cement and zinc sheets, raised above a swamp by means of stilts and wooden walkways. The other half, built on solid ground reclaimed from the sea, seemed to be clawing its way out of the primordial swamp, attempting to become something else (p.48).

In other words, Lagos, according to Graceland, is the place where "relationship had never made sense" (p. 49) and the text uses the metaphor to enhance the argument that the postcolonial state is faced with an identity crisis.

As a result, as metaphor, the village is suggestive of innocence while the other is a state of experience: contamination and decadence as implied character of the metropolis. Also, Afikpo is a

state of serenity, conviviality and purity. Lagos, on the other hand, is the perpetual state of upheaval, callousness and defiance. This shows that the post-colony is in a state of anomie and social turmoil in spite of the fact that Nigeria, as a polity, knows that calm and truth lie in the ways of the unspoiled Africa. Also, the tall palm trees and thick foliage of Abeokuta reminds Elvis of Afikpo's forests, "where he went to escape his father's anger … penetrated only by the call of invisible animals and birds" (Abani: 241).

Nonetheless, Graceland argues that the safety of the forests is now "tenuous". This the text portrays through the act of the King of Beggars in Ijebu, which points out that corruption has invaded villages, and their sanctity is now tainted by the filthy ones from the city, which Lagos represents symbolically:

> The King, the troupe leader, had gone off to see the local chief to get permission to perform that evening. He also needed the local Catholic priest's permission. Both would cost him money (p.275).

Abeokuta, Ijebu and, especially, Ibare – places within the same geographical space – are, therefore, a figment of that past that the present is skirting.

Ibare is a small town where "THE STRUNGLE CONTINUES" (Abani: 234), and it represents the past of the post-colony and its continuous struggle to defy the polluting influences of the present

while standing up for the ancient practices that define the ways of the founders of Ibare. This position is bolstered by how Graceland presents the events in Ibare. In essence, one can posit that Ibare is symbolic of the village square where one's peers become the arbiter of one's impropriety: the people of Ibare judged Anthony and Conrad, the Colonel's agents, and they were considered unworthy of a continues existence. Therefore, they were banished from the Ibare landscape by death. Consequently, Ibare symbolises a new possibility born of the past and current situations in the post-colony in the sense that the entire community – man and dog – is determined to chase from its midst the bad social elements being created in the new Africa: "As Redemption roared off, a barking dog chased after them" (Abani: 238).

Succinctly, Ibare depicts how some of the new Africans are dealing with the pressures that the postcolonial state foists on its people. Also, Graceland tells how the denizens are engaging with the black elites, who now use government resources to serve their personal interests, and employ same government apparatus to unleash a reign of terror on the people they claim to serve and protect. The essence of the conversation below is in the fact that it shows how the post colony is destroying its young ones as a result of the greed of those colluding with the agents of imperialism that are simply interested in 'farming' the land:

> Elvis headed off, and Redemption became aware that the young girl in the back was sobbing.

> "What is your name?" he asked.
>
> "Kemi," the girl replied.
>
> "Are you hungry?"
>
> She shook her head, but he couldn't tell if it was from sobbing or in response to his question.
>
> "Look, you better stop crying before they come back," he said.
>
> "Please don't kill me, sir," she sniffled.
>
> "Who go kill you? Nobody want to kill you."
>
> "The other man said he is going to kill us," she said
>
> "Where you learn to blow grammar like dis?"
>
> "I am in secondary school."
>
> "So what are you doing with dese people?"
>
> "They kidnapped me, sir" (p.235).

However, it is through the overarching structure and characterisation that Graceland states that there is an unbridled attempt by the citizenry to come to terms with the present without the collaboration of their political leaders.

And by using hysteron proteron, which is a figurative device in which events in the temporal order are revised, Chris Abani overwhelmingly relies on a technique that encourages him to create a

chaotic, spasmodic effect through a persistent look-back by the protagonist, Elvis. The fact that the post-colony, with its overwhelming influences of modernisation, is sentimentally attached to its past that is steeped in tradition is one of the major reasons for the state of insanity that a modern African state finds itself. But then, this heritage is the moral centre that holds the individual together, metaphorically, in a disquieting city with no moral centre. So, a study of metaphor as aesthetics in Graceland would be incomplete if the author's astute manipulation of the text's structure and its characterisation are not analysed.

One unique feature of Graceland is that Chris Abani dates the chapters, and he does this in a non-chronological way. In so doing, he tells the reader that Graceland is a constant flashback. As a result, it becomes obvious that every scene or episode is a deliberate insertion by Chris Abani in a style devoid of any natural flow of events from the previous incident. This form, therefore, largely contributes to a non-cohesive formant, which then gives rise to the epileptic nature of the text's structural mechanism. Epilepsy describes the effect Graceland has on its readers because the medical condition, when triggered, causes a violent movement of the body. By definition, epilepsy is a form of seizure that occurs when "the brain receives a burst of abnormal electrical signals that temporarily interrupts normal electrical brain function."[25] Basically, it is "a condition in which there is

[25] Anon, 'Epilepsy and Seizures' in The Scientific Study of the Nervous System, viewed 24 July 2006, at: http:// virtualtrials.com/dictionary.cfm

a problem with the brain that causes long-term seizures in the person. Epilepsy seizures are seizures that occur more than once and without a special cause. These seizures are also called idiopathic seizures."[26]

Reading Graceland jerks the mind constantly. This tug, which equates a violent movement, is as a result of the fact that the reader is engaged in a wrenching activity that constantly flip-flops its mind between the surreal and the ordinary. One other thing: in this state, there is a conscious attempt by the reader to interconnect the narratives going on simultaneously in a disjointed fashion. R.F. Dietrich and Roger H. Sundell (1978) argue that when a writer relates events exactly as they happen, he does this purely for the primitive appeal to suspense (p.129). However, Graceland is an aberration because it does not induce curiosity and suspense through the pattern of events that Aristotle's Poetics describes as the "first principle" and "the soul of tragedy." Aristotle's 'imitation of the action' requires a plot to be 'whole'. The signification of his theory is embedded in the belief that there should be a beginning, middle and an end in the arrangement of the incidents in a work of fiction. What this implies, structurally, is that if any of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed. The German critic, Gustav Freytag in what is now referred to as the Freytag's pyramid, also reinforces this principle. But in Graceland, the structure of the plot speaks

[26] ---, 'What is Epilepsy?' in The Scientific Study of the Nervous System, viewed 24 July 2006, at: http:// virtualtrials.com/dictionary.cfm

otherwise: Take off a chapter, and its absence will not upset the narrative since nothing grows naturally out of the text's structure and plot. What is obvious is that the text has a premeditated structure imposed upon it. Thus, in Graceland, there is a conscious cannibalisation of correctness as a technique. If, as J.A. Cuddon (1999) argues, the cornerstone of this literary principle is a virtuous adherence to and conformity with rules, convention and decorum (p.181), then Chris Abani is a deviant because, in Graceland, he abandons any form of convention structurally. This is the consequence of his embrace of expressionism, a movement in Germany in which its proponents avoided the representation of external reality by projecting themselves and a highly personal vision of the world (Cuddon: 297). If the main principle involved in expressionism is that expressionism determines form, and therefore imagery, punctuation, syntax, and so forth, then Chris Abani's design is an organic metaphor that carries an implicit tenor, which is neurological disorder.

In Graceland, Chris Abani paints the chaotic Nigerian reality, which is a contradiction of everything logical. In the post colony, the text says: "Nothing happened in subtle degrees – not the weather, not the movement of time, and certainly not nature" (p. 241). Consequently, the writer enhances this image of incoherency through the metaphor of neurological disorder by avoiding the true representation of external reality in terms of "the movement of time". In the text, Chris Abani's ideal personal vision of what the post-colony is, as an expressionist, dictates that the form of the novel seeks to avoid the exact representation of external reality. Since expressionism makes possible the

ability to show inner psychological realities (Cuddon: 181) that do not necessarily follow any chronological pattern, this technique allows the writer to exhibit most features of the anti-novel, which is a kind of fiction that tends to be experimental and breaks with the traditional story-telling methods and form of the novel. For this reason, Graceland does not begin in a state of equilibrium as conventionally plotted stories do and there is no initial stability to be disturbed by some event that incites conflict at a later stage in the manner R.F. Dietrich and Roger H. Sundell suggest in their study (p.129).

In disavowing the neat categories as exposition, development, climax and resolution, the text connects the past with the present and comments on human condition by striking deep into the mind and heart of its reader through a non-conventional structure imbued with the ability to fluster the sensibility of the readers. The physical effect of this structure on the reader is the fact that a spasm is felt as the reader engages with the text. This intermittent jerking, which is occasioned by the consistent forward and backward movements in the two parallel narratives in the novel, is representative of a swelling tremor that is epileptic in nature, which is suggestive of neurological disorder.

In terms of characterisation, Graceland focuses on the plight of the ordinary people. In other words, the bourgeoisies have no voice in the text. Their silence, according to the text, is broken only by

the Colonel like the “call of wild dogs in hills far in the distance, the shrill of crickets, the throaty blues of frogs” (p. 37).

In Graceland, we see an elite whose voice has been stifled and, who are also victims of the junta. Military rule is an aberration, but “Elvis could not remember when the military had not run the country” (Abani: 173). Graceland’s civil society knows that the men in uniform are the “original gangster” (p. 163) – the rogue elite in their community – but they willingly succumb to the gangster’s tyranny because, according to Redemption, “who else dem go follow? Only prophets fit help us now, we be like the Israelites in the desert. No hope, no chance, no Moses. Who else we go follow?”(p. 245).

Through the metaphoric use of the dramatic method of characterisation, Graceland effectively offers the kind of characterisation needed to engage its reader as well as to convey the theme and move the plot. Of course, the text has a multiplicity of themes, but in terms of plot its thematic concern is one dimensional with regard to its purpose, which is a diagnosis and demonstration of a disease that has destroyed the nervous systems of a nation and weakened its moral sense. For instance, through the palpable tension in Elvis’ life since he is caught between the values of the two civilisations that manifest vividly in Graceland, there is a consonance with the argument by Wendy Griswold (2000) that states:

> It is not enough that the protagonist moves from one world to another; the two worlds must be shown parallel to one another, contending for the protagonist's soul (p. 166).

In Graceland, Chris Abani uses two protagonists as primary characters to manifest the metaphoric concerns of the text: Nigeria and Elvis. With regard to Nigeria, this fact emerges in the not too obvious linear development of Nigeria as a character and the conscious non-linear growth of Elvis in the text. Consequently, characterisation, generally, is a telescoped metaphor in Graceland whereas Nigeria as the personage that shapes the growth of the various characters in the text is a subdued metaphor.

Nigeria is the object of Chris Abani's disaffection. And, Graceland largely portrays the country as an irresponsible character that lacks the essential requirement to father a child. Since Nigeria is abstract, Sunday Oke personifies the Nigerian character metaphorically because Graceland defines Nigeria as a character through the relationship that exists in Elvis' family. And, also, through the relationship that exists between Elvis and other characters in the text. To an extent, this describes the post colony since, through their lives, the text comments on the state of the nation and how the leadership has failed according to Chris Abani's interpretation of the state as a father figure. His conclusion is that all the relationships "had never made sense" (p.49). Therefore, as a metaphor of the nation, Elvis' family can be construed as a mirror image of Nigeria: This

sense of interchangeability brings to the fore, concretely, a nation split in the middle with no obvious 'family' head, incongruous and definitely with no 'mother 'figure:

> It was just his luck to be born into the only home in the small town with a psychotic father, a dead mother and a Scottish-sounding witch for a grandmother (p.102).

This condition that incubates a sense of frustration is what makes a citizen of a country to disavow its motherland and embrace exile. When Elvis admonishes Felicia about the significance of her husband in spite of the circumstances of their marriage, it is easy to perceive Felicia's husband as the personified America which an exile should call home: "Well you better make him your family. This one fell apart a long time ago" (p. 165). Thus, the absurdity that surrounds the Oke family delineates the nervous complexity that represents Nigeria. Like Sunday, Nigeria suggests that "has lost his way" (p. 27). And to show that this condition is irreversible, Graceland develops this two-dimensional configuration through a simple story that establishes the character's flatness. Through the conflict that consumes the narrative like a conflagration, the country exhibits no change in attribute to redeem itself by asserting the will to survive its bane.

One reason why Nigeria, as a concern in the text, is lost is as a result of the proliferation of values in the society. Graceland captures this dilemma when it succinctly declares: "the younger workers

wanted the stations that played Wham! Sade, Duran Duran and Peter Tosh, and the older workers wanted more indigenous music" (p. 28).

What comes to the forefront is that every generation of the Nigerian populace has different social values, which are contending for the soul of the nation in contemporary society. This tug of war playing itself out amongst the citizens, no doubt, has its consequences: It throws the nation into fits of anger and nervous breakdown as the population engages one another in an ideological and class battle in their daily quest for survival.

For the ordinary people that make up the nation besides its geographical terms, life is a vicious circle and there is no fine line that separates them from psychological dilapidation except the path to ruin:

> The madam of the bar smiled. She was very ready to extend credit to all her customers, who were mostly poor and unemployed anyway. But even her generosity had its limits, though she understood that they had come to drown their sorrows in her watered-down alcohol. They needed her and she needed them; they drank, she sold. If she was owed, she owed the palm wine supplier, who owed someone else; everyone owed someone these days, it was the vogue (p. 52).

When Oye says in Graceland, “Not every hoose is a hame” (p. 101), the author is brazenly saying that not every nation is a country. So, why is the Oke’s house not a home? And, what is a state and why is Nigeria not one?

According to Joanna Sullivan (2004), the nation constitutes itself through the will and the imagination of the citizens of the state. Therefore:

> The health of the nation depends on each citizen’s desire to identify with the entire population of the nation despite racial, ethnic, or religious differences. This idea of loyalty to the nation above and beyond individual differences is known as nationalism (p. 71).

Because Nigeria has lost its significance as a state and fatherland, the image created in the mind of the reader as he comes to grips with the reality of Graceland establishes the reason why nationalism is not an ethos of the people, whose drama the text enacts. Graceland, through Elvis, projects this view thus:

> Elvis mopped his brow with a dirty handkerchief and stared around the small town. … Wherever they were, he did not speak the language. That was the problem with a country that was an amalgamation of over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups, he thought – too many *bloody* [emphasis mine] languages (p. 274).

What is obvious in this paragraph is the fact that Elvis does not identify himself with the entire population. Rather, he emphasises the ethnic lines that separate the citizens thereby echoing the belief that "Nigeria is a sham nation" as argued by Joanna Sullivan and this gives vent to another postulation by James Coleman (1965), which states that Nigeria is "a mere geographical expression designed by the British but not ratified by the Nigerian people" (p.320). This line of thought is corroborated In The Open Sore of a Continent, in which Wole Soyinka argues that Nigeria is a non-nation. These sentiments are as a result of the fact that most scholars like Joanna Sullivan believed that Nigeria's failure is rooted in the idea that "ethnic loyalties and religious differences precede and supersede any notions of national loyalty." This very condition is what prompted Nigeria's first Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa (cited in Coleman, 1965), to say:

> Since 1914 the British government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs, and do not show themselves any sign of willingness to unite (p.320).

The words with which Chris Abani begins the last chapter of Graceland drives cold sweat down one's spine because over four decades after the Balewa declaration, the attitude is that: "There is only one history: Igbo" (p. 299). These words portray the feeling, which Joanna Sullivan (2001, 75)

says, “further promote ethnic identities which ultimately undermine the national consciousness.” Thus, the only thread that binds people together in Graceland is the struggle for survival.

Elvis comes across as a flat character, too. His ethical dilemma is his biggest bane. Although he acknowledges it when he tells the King of the Beggars that he has “… a bit of an ethical dilemma” (p. 96), yet it is not explicit in the text that Elvis appreciates the full impact of his conflicting emotions vis-à-vis his desire to do what is right in society. In the text, it is the pangs of hunger that fuels his survival instinct as the passage below reveals:

> Elvis stared at the mound of grey powder. It wasn’t white – at least not the way he had expected cocaine to be. He rubbed a little between his fingers. It felt coarse, not smooth like icing sugar, the way he had imagined.
>
> “Careful,” Redemption warned. “Dat is big money.”
>
> “Sorry,” Elvis mumbled, brushing the grainy stuff from his fingers back onto the pile. “Redemption, this is serious business. It is –“
>
> “I know what it is. Are you in or out?”
>
> “I don’t know” (p.107).

This ambivalence is what defines Elvis throughout the text. However, when he considers the fact that “he could probably wrap a few hundred in a night, and at ten naira per wrap, it came to a lot of money,” he effusively declares, “I’m in” (p. 108). His motivation is his vision of the insalubrious condition of hunger. With this, Graceland diagnoses one of the causes of crime in any society,

when the narrator's voice declares non-plus: "He had never made this much money for less than a month's work. Now, in one night, here it is" (p. 109). This is a comment on the lure of riches and its negative consequence for the postcolonial state.

Elvis' relationship with Redemption and The King of Beggars is the externalisation of the conflict for his soul by the forces of good and evil. Elvis as a character, in as much as he is an individual eking a living on the streets just like every ordinary product of the post colony, is a miniature of the nation. In a metaphoric sense, he is another face through which the nation, whose story Graceland recreates, is recognised. Sadly, it is a sorry image that compels pity. If only Nigeria could pause for a minute and see its scary self. Its reaction would be same as Elvis':

> Elvis stared into the muddy puddles, imagining what life, if any, was trying to crawl its way out. His face reflected back at him, seemed to belong to a stranger, floating there like a ghostly head in a comic book. … His dark eyes looked tired, the whites flecked with red. He parted his full lips and tried a smile on his reflection, and his *reflection snarled back*. Shit, he thought, *I look as shit* [emphasis mine] (p. 6).

A secondary character that is very compelling in its role as a metaphor is Beatrice. First and foremost, she is a griot and, Oye's words exemplify this fact when she tells her: "Tell your son tha things he should know," (p.37). In Graceland, the relationship that exists between Oye and her

daughter, and between Beatrice and Elvis is that of the custodians of a people's heritage: Oye handed over to Beatrice the knowledge "dat useless school cannot" (p.38). Beatrice did same thing to her son by writing "down a recipe for an herbal treatment that Oye was dictating to her" (p.44). What comes to light here is the idea of three generation of Nigerian historians, who are witnesses to the various stages of development in their society: Oye dictates as in oral literature; Beatrice documents in long hand, and Elvis disseminates in print through Graceland. This knowledge that has been passed down serves as a balm in Graceland:

> He rummaged in his bag for his can of sparkle spray. He couldn't find it, so he began pulling everything out of the bag, including a journal tied with string. Its leather binding was old and cracked.
>
> Elvis paused for a moment and untied it, flicking quickly through the pages as though in search of a spell to find the lost sparkle spray. His fingers traced the spidery writing. It was his mother's journal, a collection of cooking and apothecary recipes and some other unrelated bits. … He stared at the page he had opened it to and read the recipe as though it were a fortifying psalm. Closing the journal with a snap, he retied it and returned it to his bag with the other items he'd taken out (p.11).

One could visualise a frantic Elvis in the paragraph above, whose worries spring from a western contraption (the lost sparkle spray). This anxiety is stopped in its tracks when he finds the old, cracked journal tied with string, which is all that he had inherited from his mother.

Beatrice does not only represent a griot. She elicits another dual image, which is that of Nigeria and Mother Nature. The former is the body that is fighting itself, which is full of "emptiness where her breast had been," (p.39) while the latter represents the pristine Africa in its glory, which did not require any form of artificial enhancement to stand its own: "She never could wear makeup, your mother. She was so dark it never showed" (p.104).

Away from this categorisation, she is a metaphor for a desirable teacher since the text always interjects moral values through her voice, especially in terms of how a younger person, who is the new African, must relate with an elderly person in the African society. Besides, the text constructs her as the ideal African woman when juxtaposed with the ugliness, corruption and stench that Comfort connotes as a contemporary woman. In a way, Beatrice is the essence of the nation's wellbeing. In real meaning, she is a metaphor for all that holds the nation together before the coming of the modern civilisation. Once the imperialists and their agents scuttled this, the post colony lost its core values. Graceland affirms this belief when the text declares: "Since your mother died, your dad lost his way…" (p.216).

Redemption is another secondary character with a primary function of a metaphor. His meaning is typified by Oye's anecdote – the story of the thieves buried alive. And, the story foreshadows the import of Redemption as a character:

> "In tha olden days, criminals and murderers were buried alive, standing up. A flowering stake was driven through their heads and they became the trees. Tha is why tha fruit is so sweet.
> … You know why tha criminals were killed tha' way? Redemption. In death they were given a chance to be useful, to feed fruit-bearing trees (p.20-21)

Redemption, the character, serves this function. Dubious as he is, in life he contributes positively to the development of Elvis. Basically, the coldness or insensitivity that he displays through his nonchalance towards the ills around him shows that he is dead to all that causes pain in his society. He is detached, but he is very sensitive to the needs or feelings of Elvis. This makes him the "fruit-bearing tree". Above all, he is what R.F. Dietrich and Roger H. Sundell (1978:80) call a foil because he "exists principally to bring out some trait or aspect of [Elvis] through contrast." Hustling is his trade. As a vital body part of Nigeria, the character, he is the embodiment of the desperation that faces the modern postcolonial state in its quest for relevance in the comity of nations. He is symbolic, but he works well as a metaphor for the nation in this regard. Also, in parting with his passport, which has the American visa, Redemption dies and he resurrects in Elvis, who then is given the chance to be useful as an exile.

Oye comes across as a metaphor for the native who has faithfully absorbed some of the culture that colonisation brought with it. Her cultural identity may be ill defined as a result, but she is obviously proud of her acquisition even if she was thought of as a walking confusion and an irritant:

> Elvis … loved his grandmother, but she had a Scottish accent, picked up from the missionaries she worked for, and he didn't always understand what she said (p.35).

Surprisingly, in the same breath, Oye epitomises the resilience of the African people in the face of the emasculating tendencies of imperialism:

> The older women, in their fifties and sixties, often walked about with their chests bare. Even *Oye did it* [emphasis mine]. It was a custom that the British had not been able to stamp out in spite of fines and edicts, and one that the Catholic priests were happy to indulge.

As indicated above, tradition still lives in the new African despite the might of imperialism in its design to exterminate the culture of the colonised.

The overwhelming signification of these characters is made manifest by the fact that they help enhance the epileptic feature of the Nigerian nation, which is a condition that I argue is the text's

structural mechanism. However, the very characters that exhibit real attributes that are symptomatic of nervous diseases are the *dramatic personae* that are like a flash in the pan.

Epilepsy, as stated earlier, is associated with seizures. Amongst the different forms of seizures associated with it, I identify the complex partial seizure, which is evidenced by the reaction of the trader whose "second-hand clothes smuggled in from Cameroon through the port town of Okirika" (p.73) were set ablaze by a member of the "task force". This type of seizure that commonly occurs in the temporal lobe of the brain - the area of the brain that controls emotion and memory function - usually leads to a loss of consciousness. And, during such an experience, a variety of behaviours can occur. These behaviours may range from gagging, lip smacking, running, screaming, crying, and/or laughing.[27] The victim of the task force displays these attributes:

> A man came running toward him, carrying some clothes on hangers, a policeman hot on his heels…. Still prone from the policeman's tackle, he watched the fire slowly turn his goods into a mass of hot ashes (p.73).

The word "watched" suggests to me a momentary seizure after the area of the brain that controls emotion and memory function has been triggered by the brutal experience. Metaphorically, the fallen man is unconscious. When he gained consciousness, he exhibits further behavioural

[27]Anon, "What Are the Types of Seizures?" in The Scientific Study of the Nervous System, viewed 24 July 2006, at: http:// virtualtrials.com/dictionary.cfm

patterns that are compatible with clinically proven behaviours associated with complex partial seizures:

> "Every day I go walk up and down, ringing one small bell make people see me," the man continued, his voice breaking. He stared into the blaze and the flames ripped through his heart, the fire entering him. His mind reached back and, like a dead star, collapsed upon itself. He screamed. It was sudden…. The man screamed again and tore his clothes off, dancing around the fire naked, emitting piercing calls, bloodcurdling in their intensity. Before anyone could react, he jumped into the fire. As the flames licked him, it seemed the fire smacked its lips in satisfaction (p.74).

Since Graceland's structure is epileptic in nature, the myoclonic seizure is prevalent in this context. This particular type of seizure "refers to quick movements or sudden jerking of a group of muscles. These seizures tend to occur in clusters, meaning that they may occur several times a day, or for several days in a row."[28] As a result, when one considers the effect of the episodic technique adopted in Graceland in telling the story of Elvis on one hand, and that of Nigeria, on the other, it creates an ambience that pokes the reader with this jerky feeling. Also, the relations that exist between the two parallel stories in Graceland, and the need to keep in view the meaning and

[28] Anon, "What Are the Types of Seizures?" in The Scientific Study of the Nervous System, viewed 24 July 2006, at: http:// virtualtrials.com/dictionary.cfm

relevance of the Ibo cosmology in the context of the text heighten this: the story, which opens with "This is the kola nut. The seed is a star. This star is life. This star is us" (p.3) and the other that starts with "Elvis stood by the open window. Outside: heavy rain. He jammed the wooden shutter open with an old radio battery, against the wind" (p.3) both suggest that the battle for the mind of the post colony is the most significant culprit that swings the colony between two worlds in a manner that suddenly jerks one from one consciousness to the other. This, in other words, is the biggest concern that contemporary writers are faced with. In a study (Wilkinson, 1992) "the true invasion takes place not when a society has been taken over by another society in terms of its infrastructure, but in terms of its mind and its dreams and its myths, and its perception of reality" (p.86).

Muscular Dystrophy is another form of neurological disease, which Graceland explores metaphorically. Also known as MD, it is a "progressive weakness and degeneration of the skeletal or voluntary muscles which control movement."[29] It causes a selective pattern of weakness and Muscular Dystrophy is hereditary. In Graceland, Elvis' degeneration can be traced to Beatrice, his mother, who is the allegory of the motherland that is already sick with telltale signs of cancer, which

[29] Anon. 'Muscular Dystrophy' in The Scientific Study of the Nervous System, viewed 24 July 2006, at: http:// virtualtrials.com/dictionary.cfm

has left a "sore scar tissue where her breast had been" (p.36). This signifies the loss of a vital means of nourishment by the motherland.

I interrogate this concept vis-à-vis the obvious weakness of the moral fibre of the nation and the majority of its people. The youthful Elvis, in particular, is the personification of this weakness and degeneration and he embodies the soul of the Nigerian nation. In Graceland, Elvis recalls an aspect of the young artist in a discourse by Ayo Mamudu on Ben Okri's The Landscape Within. According to Ayo Mamadu, the young artist's "passionate involvement and detachment are paradoxically linked, in leading to moments of heightened consciousness."[30]

However, his moral weakness makes the pull towards evil or the most convenient option the better choice on many occasions, despite its despicability: he abhors criminal and immoral activities, yet he allows Redemption to knowingly lure him into prostitution, drugs smuggling, human trafficking and trafficking of "spare human parts", which are taken forcefully in a gruesome way from kidnapped people. And, when an opportunity presents itself for Elvis to redeem himself, he looks the other way:

[30] Mamudu, Ayo. (1991). Portrait of a Young Artist in Ben Okri's Landscapes Within. *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* [Dijon], 13(2), 85-91p.

> "No! How can it be okay?"
> As Elvis opened the back door, Kemi tried to get up from her seat, but the chains held her fast. The other kids were still stoned, and Elvis wondered why she seemed unaffected by whatever drug had been given to the others.
> "Please, sir, help me!" she begged.
> "Shut up!" Redemption shouted at her from the far side of the truck, banging on the window. She flinched and watched Elvis with sad eyes. Avoiding her gaze, Elvis looked at the three coolers (p.236).

It is this weakness that makes him to care about the suffering people, even when he knows he lacks the will to save them as Redemption aptly points out:

> "Until you see somebody dat you think is her, you never even talk of finding her. You never even think it. Now you say you want to help. Na lie. You dey want be hero, de saviour of your cousin. Oh yes, I know your type. You're your type. If you can't save yourself, den save others, abi? Dat way you can pretend to be good person" (p.246).

All through Graceland, Elvis comes across as a voice of dissent. Therefore, one would have expected that his many questions that interrogate society in order to heighten consciousness would have propelled him to act as the true moral conscience of society and, ultimately, as the saviour of the oppressed. Sadly, his weakness becomes the most avid in the consciousness of the reader: the scene of the "Necklace of fire" buttresses the fact that Elvis was created to do nothing "just like

the time that man had jumped into the fire and the time the youths had chased that thief in Bridge City. In both instances he did nothing. Now, again, he did nothing" (p.226):

> They watched as the screaming, burning Jeremiah struggled to his feet and tried to break through the circle, but men who had retrieved long wooden planks from the timber yard earlier, for this exact moment, pushed him back with the long wooden fingers. The only way out was in the direction of the timber yard, and Jeremiah headed for it…
> "We should help," Elvis said, not getting up.
> "What good is dat."?
> "The fire will spread."
> "Not our problem. Anyway, our ride is here … Elvis hesitated for a second, then followed him….
> "Get in," Redemption said, opening the back door for him.
> As he climbed into the truck, Elvis was shaking…. As they drove off, Elvis watched the spreading fire through the tinted glass. It was horrifying, yet strangely beautiful (p.228).

Above all, he lacks the will to respect his father even after Benji has admonished him to do so by saying, "…your father is a good man who has lost his way. Show respect..." (p.27):

> "Sit down, old man, before you fall down," Elvis said, rising to his feet.
> They stood staring each other down for a few minutes; then, unexpectedly, Sunday folded, his rage gone, replaced by a look Elvis took to be shame.
> "Dis world has spoiled," Sunday muttered under his breath as he sat down (p.186).

Elvis' attitude towards his father is devoid of all that is African and it makes nonsense of the beauty of the tradition that Chris Abani points to when he declares, "the Igbo are not reducible to a system of codes, and of meaning: the culture is always reaching for a pure lyric moment" (p.291). Elvis was born in Afikpo before the family migrated to Lagos. While there, the cornerstone of his existence was the foundation his parents had built his social and family values on. These were at the core of the traditions of the Igbo nation. However, Elvis does not reflect this and in him the culture is not "reaching for a pure lyric moment". Instead, it has degenerated in this moment of transformation brought about by the contact of cultures necessitated by colonialism. Consequently, Sunday's words are accurate in his analysis of the current state of the post colony: "Dis world has spoiled."

Therefore, Chris Abani describes the text's primary protagonist, like Nigeria as "a nice kid with good moves and great potential as a dancer", [although] he had yet to be original" (p.275). The writer also makes the reader to understand that this nice kid lacks the will to do good despite the fact that he "… always thought when the moment came he would do the right thing" (p.260). This condition makes Elvis to say in Graceland "his own cowardice surprised him" since there is no excuse for his failures because he has been prepared for "de trials of dis world … [as a result he was expected to] have a warrior's heart to withstand dem" (p.22). Consequently, it is right to concur

with the truism that exists in the traditional realm that states: “mistakes are expected until the boy becomes a man, but still no ground is given” (p.274).

If Elvis constitutes the ordinary citizenry of the Nigerian nation that Chris Abani depicts as a character with neurological flaws, then the Police inspector is the perfect example of those in authority. Like Elvis, he is weak and when it matters most, he fails:

> The truth was that he had never had the heart for this part of police work, the bullish, brutish enforcing of orders from above. He sighed. His men stood behind him, waiting for orders, waiting for him to redeem this farce. He turned back at them and then turned to the barrier … the inspector was getting really exasperated now. “Someone will get hurt! I don’t want dat to happen.” … Everyone was laughing except the inspector. Sunday was the first to notice the change in him, the tentative twitch of fingers reaching for his holstered pistol. Then it was out and pointing.
> The shot silenced everyone and brought one of the laughing men down (p.270).

Alzheimer's disease finds a place in the metaphoric exploit of Abani in Graceland. Described as a neurodegenerative disease that occurs in the brain[31], it often results in impaired memory, thinking, and behaviour; confusion; restlessness; personality and behaviour changes; impaired judgment; impaired communication; inability to follow directions; language deterioration; impaired visuospatial

[31] Anon.’Alzheimer’s Disease’ in The Scientific Study of the Nervous System, viewed 24 July 2006, at: http:// virtualtrials.com/dictionary.cfm

skills and emotional apathy. Unequivocally, Nigeria, as a character, and some of the minor characters in the text exemplify these attributes. Graceland captures this multifarious personality and other indicators of Alzheimer's disease thus:

> Lunch was Elvis's favourite time, not because of the small respite from work, but because it was only at lunch that he really saw the people behind the bodies that slogged through the day's work, tight-lipped and taciturn.
>
> They were a curious mix. Happy buxom women who carried cinder blocks on their heads to the upper levels, their fat shaking as they exploded into laughter at some joke. There were also masons with cement-dusted bodies and carpenters strutting with leather tool belts and young girls who should have been spending their weekdays in school and their weekends at home, grooming and giggling as they gossiped their naïve knowledge of men. Instead they had hands of used sandpaper, the backs wrinkled, the palms scoured and calloused … (p.28).

However, it is Joshua Bandele-Thomas that incarnates this disease perfectly. Graceland chronicles the character's insipid life that captures his impaired memory, thinking and behaviour as well as personality and behaviour changes in its 25th chapter:

> Joshua Bandele-Thomas was measuring the barricades at one end of the street. He stopped, muttered something and made little notes in a worn leather-bound book. Counting off ten steps, he stood away from the barrier and

> set up his surveyor's tripod. He bent and trained it on the barrier. Muttering even more, he made notes again.
>
> Sunday watched him and shook his head. Crazy bastard, he thought (p.263).

His inanity is a state of neurodegenerative disease that came upon him after he had a traumatic experience, which shattered his life's dream. Graceland calls him "an eccentric", but he was not born weird. The instability of his brain, which "marked a turning point in Joshua's life," (p.264) occurred after "thieves had broken into his room and stolen his life savings." With that money gone, his dream of going to England to study to be a surveyor evaporated. This drove him to the brink:

> Instead of the mad ranting or raving Sunday had expected, he was quiet calm about it. The only apparent difference was that he ate less and spoke only when spoken to. … Everybody thought he was fine. In fact the neighbours were admiring and spoke complimentarily of him in his absence.
>
> Then one day someone saw him down at the marina on Lagos Island. He was wearing his three-piece suit, but he had substituted his bowler for a hard hat. He also had a surveyor's level mounted on a tripod. He was causing a minor traffic jam as he went about carefully surveying the area. … Sunday had caught a bus and gone down to bring Joshua home, when he broached the subject of surveying, Joshua responded merrily, "Why ju ask, Mr. Oke? Ju want a survey?" (p264-265).

In conclusion, the picture that emerges out of this parody is that of Nigeria as a fragmented state. In every ramification, Graceland astutely depicts that the nation lacks a coherent centre that engenders stability in a polity: Sunday's household is symptomatic and symbolic of this condition. Also, through Sunday's inability to provide for his scions, Chris Abani suggests that Nigeria has failed to provide for its children. By commission, the nation destroys its own:

> At fifteen and sixteen, with no parents or interested relatives, these boys eked out a living, either as apprentice mechanics or motor park thugs (p.146).

Above all, Sunday's incapability to protect his children is the biggest disappointment that triggers the disavowing of the state. In fact, there is no decent father figure in Graceland:

> "And you can't know for sure dat what you think you saw dat time was Joseph raping his daughter. Maybe you were confused."
>
> Elvis finally had to accept that his father would never believe that Joseph was capable of rape. Or maybe he didn't want to. He had somehow deluded himself into believing that murdering Godfrey was an act of honour. He had not even considered the effect it would have on Innocent, who had to carry out the crime. This was all shit, all shit …
>
> "He raped her."
>
> "You can't know for sure, unless it happened to you," Sunday said.

> "He raped me too," Elvis said. …
>
> Sunday stared at Elvis, mouth open, searching for the possibility of a lie. But there was none. The sound, when it came from him, was nothing Elvis recognised. It was a howl. All animal, all death. It propelled Elvis off the veranda. This was not the comfort he wanted, needed. He could deal with all his father's anger, but not this. He stumbled down the street to the bus stop, ignoring the curious stares of passersby, wiping furiously at his face with his sleeve. As he walked, he realised, the only way out of this life was Redemption (p.282).

Thus, the structure of the story in Graceland and the characters the text employs to narrate it is an absolute metaphor. This echoes Joanna Sullivan's thought when she submits that the postcolonial state is "an elaborate parable of the pitfalls of neo-colonialism" (p.82).

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

As I have argued in this study, Chris Abani shares a certain sensibility with the two generations of Nigerian writers, who come first before his generation because everyone of the discernible three generations of Nigerian writers has persistently and consistently analysed the situations and conditions prevalent in the motherland. In spite of this similarity, it is my contention in this study that Chris Abani differentiates himself from the first two generations in the following ways.

Chris Abani, as a representative of the third generation of Nigerian writers, is as disenchanted and disillusioned as the first and second-generation writers. However, he departs from their calling by embracing a different agenda. While the Achebes and the Iyayis of Nigerian Literature advocate the type of nationalism and patriotism that promote the survival of the Nigerian state, Abani, on the other hand, is engrossed in an account of the facts of a situation that seems to question, in a subtle manner, the legality and validity of the nation. In this study, I have argued that the underlying discourse in Graceland suggests that its author does not see "the whole nation as its province [because, according to Joanna Sullivan (2001), Nigeria] in its own way, still very much reflects the origins, ethnicity, and still fractured identity of its creator" (p.78). Therefore, the patriotism that is absent in Graceland is the consequence of the fact that there is the ethnic factor, which prevents

the development of a collective national consciousness. By disavowing the nation, Graceland gives credence to the argument by Tirop Peter Simatei (2001) that "African fiction moves away from, rather than conforms to, the official political project of nation building" (p.9). Nigeria has three major ethnic groups – Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba – but Chris Abani proclaims in Graceland that: "There is only one history: Igbo" (p.299)

Thus, Chris Abani is parochial in his perception of the Nigerian identity, but his position is in consonance with his culture of sustained defiance, which is the very quality that sets him apart from the other Nigerian writers. While he antagonises the composition of the contemporary African state, Graceland tends to side with the traditional African nation, and the writer voices his admiration of tradition through a parallel story that celebrates the efficacy of the Igbo worldview. Graceland suggests in a subtle way that ethnic allegiance is more significant than national patriotism, even in contemporary African state. This view remains at the centre of Graceland because the kola nut that the Igbo hold sacred is the star: "This is the kola nut. This seed is a star. This star is life. This star is us" (p.3). Umuofia is the canvas Chinua Achebe uses to copiously paint the consequences of an African encounter with the west in Things Fall Apart. Yoruba idioms and metaphysics are what Wole Soyinka uses to express a nostalgic sensibility in The Strong Breed. Kole Omotoso's Memories of Our Recent Boom uses Meje (a Yoruba word for Seven) to tell the universal human story of pettiness and greed. And, Ben Okri draws from his Urhobo culture in

Starbook: A Magical Tale of Love and Regeneration. Nowhere in this corpus of literary works has any of the writers mentioned proclaim the superiority of one culture over the other.

I also argue that Chris Abani and those before him in the Nigerian literary clan engage in the crossing of boundaries. For Chris Abani, the state of endless crossing of boundaries is transmogrification, a condition that I have shown to manifest itself in several ways in Graceland. What he has achieved through this is that he asserts his identity and independence as a writer: while Chinua Achebe and his equals, first and foremost, make the decanonisation of Western culture and ideology their primary pre-occupation by using fiction to demystify the imperialist version of history before assuming the position of the gadfly in their society, Chris Abani's mission is to decentre and decanonise the old guards of Nigerian Literature. What becomes apparent in Graceland is the shifting of the literary lens from Africa's corridor of power and the obtuse lives of the elites in society towards the ordinary people: what comes to the fore is the silencing of the elites and the fact that this privileged class is also a victim of the rulers of the African state. In Graceland, the issue on the front burner is the everyday challenge that confronts the common man in his quest to relate with the new African nation with the many popular cultures jostling for his approval just as he contends with the demands of the new world both economically and politically. In this study, I have argued that the new African is faced with an ethical dilemma and, as Graceland points out, he is " a mess of conflicting emotions."

I have also argued that Chris Abani's generation of Nigerian writers and the two preceding generations employ the use youthful protagonist in their narratives. But what sets Graceland apart is its development of Elvis, which allows a critical appraisal of the character with special emphasis on the social development of a two-year-old child. My submission in this study is that Elvis, as a child crossing the boundaries separating him from adolescence, is already well acquainted with the challenges prevalent in the precarious world that forms the very centre of adult life in Nigeria.

This psychological growth of Elvis as a youthful protagonist takes us to the core of my argument in this study, which is that Chris Abani employs metaphor to explore the neurological state of the Nigerian nation. In the development of the structure and characterisation of Graceland, Chris Abani signals what is his most important contribution to the Nigerian literary tradition. To effectively portray the medical condition of Nigeria and other characters in the text with telling effect, Chris Abani employs a massive deployment of not too familiar literary devices. These helped in the explication of the many neurological disorders that bedevil the country and some of the characters that are representative of the citizenry. Besides, the use of symbolism is a condition that also impacts on Chris Abani's use of language. I argue in this study that Graceland's language is demotic. This is because Chris Abani uses the language of the common people. This technique allows characters to speak in their own voices and consciousness just as it accentuates Graceland's dialectical form. In the face of these disturbing circumstances that Chris Abani

recreates in Graceland, it is his advocacy for the hybridisation of the African that speaks to how the new African must engage with the condition of the postcolony. This is Graceland's foremost ideological project. But to fully understand Chris Abani's thesis, one has to truly appreciate the import of the molue metaphor in the text:

> Molues were buses unique to Lagos, and only that place could have devised such a hybrid vehicle, its "magic" the only thing keeping it from falling apart. The cab of the bus was imported from Britain, one of the Bedford series. The chassis of the body came from surplus Japanese army trucks trashed after the Second World War. The body of the coach was built from scraps of broken cars and discarded roofing sheets – anything that could be beaten into shape or otherwise fashioned. The finished product, with two black stripes running down a canary body, looked like a roughly hammered yellow sardine tin (p.8-9).

The molue is functional as a means of transportation in the metropolis in spite of the fact that two or more things from different cultures were put together to make one new thing: a unique vehicle. The meaning these conflated parts of this indigenous contraption evokes speaks to the new African in the sense that it suggests, in the physical terms, what Elvis and Oye aim at achieving in the spiritual realm with their prayers: "his prayer and her incantations interwove in the gathering dusk, calming them both" (p.68). In essence, Graceland argues that there is beauty in the new African

because he is a sublime combination of cultures. This experience is desirable in the face of social changes and personal disillusionment of modern life.

This study is, therefore, significant because it does not only establish how Chris Abani has intervened in the literary culture of the Nigerian nation, but it announces the new approach to solving Africa's socio-cultural dilemma. Above all, it is the coming of age of the third generation of Nigerian writers because Graceland indicates that the new voices of Nigerian Literature are set to rupture the monopoly hitherto enjoyed by the canonical writers.

NOTES

[i] Adesanmi and Dunton point out that Harry Garuba captures this brilliantly in his essay published in English in Africa 32.1 (May 2005) by discussing the absence of the "ritualist centre" of first and second-generation textualities from the ever-expanding third generation corpus. According to them, the absence of a "centre" constructed on a foundation of historical and traditional totalities makes for a much more expansive creative space, fluid plot, faster-paced narrative, and language shorn of the domestication-impulse of the first and second generation writers. The two scholars also point out that setting is almost always urban and ambience is equally euromodernist. They argue that the investment in urban experience--Adesokan's Roots in the Sky, Nwosu's Invisible Chapters, Abani's Graceland, Atta's Everything Good will Come, Kan's Ballad of Rage, and Habila's Waiting for an Angel are all set in Lagos--is what ultimately positions Nigeria's third generation texts at the cross-current of transnational textualities of the Black world in particular and the global south in general.

[ii] Neurology is the branch of medicine dealing with the nervous system and its disorders. The nervous system is a complex, sophisticated system that regulates and coordinates body activities. It is made up of two major divisions: a central nervous system made up of the brain and the spinal cord; and, a peripheral nervous system, which consists of all other neural elements. In addition to the brain and spinal cord, principal organs of the nervous system are: eyes, ears, sensory organs of taste, sensory organs of smell, sensory receptors located in the skin, joints, muscles, and other parts of the body. The nervous system is vulnerable to various disorders caused principally by injuries, infections, degeneration, structural defects and tumours can damage it.[ii]

[iii] Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton, in their paper, “Nigeria’s third generation writing: historiography and preliminary theoretical considerations”, argue that writers who are categorised as belonging to a particular generation have their themes/tropes shaped by identifiable events or experiences commonly shared. This sets them apart beside the fact that they fall within a determined age bracket, or are published within a loosely defined time frame.

[iv] Cuddon describes the self-conscious narrator as one who employs techniques related to the theories of foregrounding and defamiliarisation. Through these devices, the writer reveals to and reminds the reader that the narration is a work of fiction while at the same time pointing up or exposing the discrepancies between the fiction and the reality, which it seems to represent.

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