"Adaogu". A short story. The Muse: Literary Journal of the English Association at Nsukka (English Department, University of Nigeria, Nsukka), No. 4, May, pp. 11-16

Chukwuma Azuonye, University of Massachusetts Boston
You will know her if you think very well. Tall thing that walks like antelope, the only daughter of our dead brother Mazi Izuogu. She went to Ala Bekee, but there is nothing inside her head. It is that thing which is said that tallness is not that my child has grown. Look now, see what has happened to the mother of Adaogu: a woman who was eating on table yesterday, she is now eating on the floor. World has rejected her because of what her daughter went and did. If you turn as if you are going to Ekeagu market, at the side of Iyieke stream, you will find her daylong dirge steaming smoke from her house....Yes. But why am I telling you what you all know? Is there a person in this our Okom who does not know Adaogu that keeps mouth like twin chips of fire?

Do you know what happened? This tigress, this our daughter Adaogu: she went and told her own daughter whom she bore nine months inside her belly to be calling her 'Anty'! Have you seen that kind of thing before? That a woman whose chi smeared with chalk and gave child, should go and tell her own child to be calling her 'Anty'! You do not understand this thing except you know what Bekee calls 'Anty'. Me, I did not go to school, but my brother who went to school has told me; 'Anty' is what the children of Bekee call their big sisters like our children call their own 'Daada'. When I heard this thing, our people, I did not know myself again. I spat off and said: "May my eyes never see my ears except in a mirror! Run-come and see where the shit of dogs spark fire!"

Story concerning what happened to Adaogu what Adaogu went and did; I tell it with anger, yes, I spit out to tell it. Because this thing is eating food in my belly, but Adaogu does not call it anything, and Adaogu will not hear. Dog of foul wind, wherever she goes she scatters people. Her story will turn the belly of everybody here. I know. But I tell it as I heard it, I will not hide my mouth. Yes, why should I hide my mouth, did Adaogu hide her anus when she was farting this bad air into our noses? Did she hide her mouth when she used the mouth with which she eats yams and cocoyams and told her own daughter to be calling her 'Anty'? It was that
IJEOMA MY SISTER

Ijeoma my sister,
God's early morning creation;
Like wedding cake baked with icing.

The fragrance of quick scent
that nourishes my nostrils
from the stewpot of mother's kitchen.
The flower vase that cheers
our father's parlour!

Ogbonna Agu.

BLEEDING ONIONS

Softly, woman,
You spill blood into a swollen heart.
Pruned to swallow women's malice,
I'm venomous!
Careful how you cleave your rage
Or you sneeze with your eyes.

Ogbonna Agu.

time that the earth broke in two, my brothers. You see, this the kind of thing which when it happens should not be covered; because when it rots open everything with which we live will follow it and rot. But Chineke, let evil not prevail! I say tufia to what the earth deplores. I say tufia to what ought not be heard with ears!

If you go to town now, everywhere is shaking: Adaogu! Adaogu! Adaogu! Up and down, everywhere is shaking shaking shaking. There is nobody there who does not know what Adaogu did with herself. It is that thing which is said that at the ninth month who can hide pregnancy from the eye of the world? But the shame of this thing is not the shame of Adaogu but our own. The people of the town are now putting everything on our head, because Adaogu is our daughter. What else will they say? They say that Adaogu is what she is because the people of Okom are all like that! It is that thing which is said that one finger takes oil but it spreads to the others. But that one is another story.

The thing that happened was that Adaogu wanted to make 'Miss'. Everyday everyday upon noon upon moon, she has been making miss miss all her life. Even if river is eating her she will still be making miss. But how can you be making miss miss like that everyday everymoon and not miss your road one night. That was what happened. So Adaogu was making miss miss like that and one day like this she missed her road. Because everyday is not christmas. But Adaogu does not know that yet. The whole town is breaking its head because of this thing, but when you look, there is no shame inside the eyes of Adaogu. That is what I was saying, that shame does not catch a madman but his brother. Now this thing has happened, it is Okom they are carrying about. I was in town. I saw Adaogu. Shame was killing me for her, but she was flashing her eyes, flashing her eyes, flashing her eyes about like what I do not know, and she was walking with all herself tied up as if she does not go to latrine. What else shall I say? Here in Okom, come and see her mother how she has shrivelled overnight, but go to town and see Adaogu how she is smelling like the queen of spirits and dancing staccato from man to man. I say, Tufia!

So Adaogu went and told her own daughter whom she bore nine months inside her belly to be calling her 'Anty'. And this her daughter was calling her Anty calling her Anty calling her Anty.... My brothers, this thing: it is fearful. Tell me, with which mouth shall we tell it? In all my truth we have never seen its like in Okom.

But you all know how Adaogu got this her daughter. You will remember that time she came back from Ala Bekee, when we were making funeral for her father; you remember how she march-entered our house of tears for her own father wearing trawsa like a man, and the only thing that came out of that
her bad mouth was "Ityshasheml" Today we know what that bad word means and we do not know what to say. Adaogu did not weep her father three nights and she carried the corpse of herself and went to town to dance harlot with everyman she saw. That was why nobody agreed to marry her because they say that her eyes are too open, that she has killed herself with abortion. It remained like this, and everymoon the flower was not seen. Every moon the flower was not seen. Adaogu drank red ink drank red ink drank red ink until she nearly died. Then one moon she forgot to drink red ink, forgot her abortion belt, and the thing that wanted to happen, happened at last. It was that time that Adaogu ran to Lagos and hid until she delivered her daughter. That was the time shame began to kill the mother of Adaogu. She survived that one and agreed to suckle this child of naked conception. It was good thing for Adaogu and she ran back to town to make miss and dance harlot with her chi.

How many years was it? — Yes yes: seven years, yes. For seven years this daughter of Adaogu lived in this our Okom, a child who never sucked breast, only drank cow-milk from glass bottles, because her mother wanted to make miss. But it is a good thing that Adaogu did not throw her inside a gutter. This is what they do in town. That is how the women of the town sell themselves a penny in white-eyed market. They do not call children anything; they never dream to suckle babies.

So the daughter of Adaogu grew like that. She did not know her mother she did not know her father. She grew like that, and when she was seven, or was it eight years old, her mother's mother sent her back to Adaogu. That was when Adaogu went and told her daughter to be calling her 'Anty' so that neighbours would not know that she had a daughter as old as that! So Adaogu continued to make miss.

It is that thing which is said that when death will kill a dog it does not allow it to hear the smell of faeces. Adaogu continued making miss until wind carried her. That time I was in town, where I went to buy fish. Our house, where I was staying with my brother, was like this; and their house, where she was living with her daughter, was like that. That day she was making feast in her house, what Bekee calls 'Batday'; and do you know that this old witch went and told her guests that she was nineteen years old! This liar, that she was nineteen years old!
I asked and my brother told me that that was how it used to be with Adaogu; that what remained for her was to make her 'Batday' every moon; that 'Batday' was making her mad. And my brother said that he had attended Adaogu's Batday, attended her Batday, attended her Batday until he got tired. Are you laughing? Evil things provoke laughter. Yes. It is not like saying it to wound Adaogu, every moon was her Batday. And my brother said that what confused his eyes was how Adaogu made Batday today and said she was nineteen years old, and tomorrow she would make another Batday and say she was sixteen years old. But she was doing it like that and shame was not in her eyes. And everytime she would stand up in the eye of everybody and speak saying, "When I grow up...."; and she would speak and say, "When I born my first child..." But after she would use abortion-belt and divide her belly into two like a wasp. Stinking worm! What else shall I call her? Say, what shall I say to her -- this harlot of spirits!

So that was how it began that day. Adaogu was making Batday, and said she was nineteen years so that people will call her Miss. And that night inside her house, there was nothing to do with light. They were flashing like Rainbow inside smoke, flashing; and if you looked -- it seemed as if the night had bleeding wounds of cigarette fire. Like what is seen in dream, drunkards flowing inside smoke and rainbow lights like ghosts, dancing like people who would die tomorrow. In my truth, what happened that night is not sweet in the ear. It is Aru! It was a night without hearts. This one came, he would put his hand under a young woman's cloth and the woman would laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh, like a rat drunk with oil, and he would sink inside the man's beard. That one would come, he would -- 0, my people, let me not talk what the earth forbids! They did this thing did this thing did this thing like this until suddenly they put out the lights, pem! It is said that what happened inside that darkness, is not what mouth is used to talk.

It was then that the thing that killed Adaogu happened. It is that thing which is said that a person cannot run away from his shadow; because wherever you hide in darkness, when light comes, your shadow will follow you just like that. It was like that with Adaogu, and when light came, her shadow followed her.

I will not tell you that I know which is which, because you know how story spreads like bushfire. But one friend of my brother who went to that Batday, he told us when he came that after that time light was quenched, when light returned to the house, that one man who had wine inside his eyes stood up and made speech. He spoke and said:

"Our people, let us thank our God for the luck of this our sister, Adaogu, daughter of Mazi Izuogu. It is a good thing, and Chineke, we thank you. We say amen, and we say -- the hand that brought the things we ate and drank today, whatever it touches, let that thing multiply seven seven...."

He spoke and everybody said, "Amen!"

Again he spoke, and now earth began to shake.

"Ten years ago, it was like this. We came here and ate and drank and sang alleloya: Our sister Adaogu was nineteen years old. It has happened again. It was like this four years ago. It was like this three years ago. Chineke, let it be like this tomorrow, every moon and forever and ever...."

He spoke and everybody answered, "Amen!"

But his speech was not yet finished. He demanded and they gave him more wine and he drank. He looked at Adaogu, stared at Adaogu with red eyes. He sighed and shook his head. Adaogu sat dead, dead. It is said that if
Lens without vision,  
Udala that bites the ear,  
Iroko that gives no shadow,  
Are the frequent storms of this journey  
But hope has a morrow  
Ride on, despite the sorrow  
Brothers and sisters.

Prisca Echenim.

ADAOGU contd.

you looked at her face it was as if he would eat the speaker alive. But the one that would rip open her belly in the eyes of the world was still coming. The speaker spoke again, and when he began to speak, Adaogu broke mad.

"Our sister," he spoke, "We thank you; and we thank God. Whatever you touch, mmajji mmajji! Your chi is good. Chineke, his good arms! One thing we pray is that next moon when we come to eat Christmas again in this house and make Batday when you become nineteen years old again; let it be that God will make it that this your daughter who calls you 'Anty' will grow up and know that he should be calling you 'Mama'!

Before he spoke-finished, Adaogu rose like leopard. Her breath rose like wind. Her heart bombed like krutu. They say that she spoke fri-fri-fri like Englanlady and said she would bring Police to lock up the speaker inside Cell, that the man insulted her in her own house. What was it again they say she said? Yes, that in Ala Bekee, a man like that bold speaker must be carried to court, that he would pay out his eyes to save his head for what his tongue fanned.

She ran prem-prem ran prem-prem ran prem-prem; but the speaker continued to speak what he was speaking. Speaking, but it was not him that spoke, because he was not himself. Adaogu was barking like a dog, he did not hear her. He spoke. And he took everything that happened since Adaogu was born and told the people in that madhouse. They laughed. He told white, he told black. Then he brushed his bottom sat down, demanded and was given wine and he drank.

Adaogu was still barking, "Police! Police!"

Night caught fire in that madhouse. The people spoke: they took everything they knew about Adaogu and narrated. The women spat off and

DARK QUEEN

In the storm she stood
Upright - a queen,
For her brood
The pelican has bled.

The hawks have dived,
But her wings are firm;
Bold in their task.

Long may she live!
Our mother, darkqueen.

Maureen Erokwu.
said: "Eh! So Adaogu this is what you are!"

They believed the story; and do you know that that man who spoke and burst the belly of Adaogu, he is from this our Okom. Yes: don't you know James -- James Okonkwo the son of Okonkwo Irogewe. James the carpenter. Him. It was him that said it out. And he was not talking what he did not know. He was not talking what he did not know.

Adaogu was still barking, "Police! Police!" but she did not stop to see what was happening to her daughter whom she did not allow to get father.

"Police! Police!" Would Police give father to this girl whose heart she had killed? That was what everybody was asking her. But Adaogu was still barking, "Police! Police!" and she was inside her room rubbing pomade rubbing pancake, rubbing perfume.... That is how they rub it in town, rub out age rub out pity rub out truth rub out womanhood rub out manhood, that is how they rub out motherhood rub out generations, that is how they rub out what holds their lives. And Adaogu took another abortion belt and divided her belly into two. Then she put on wig and came out. Everybody was looking at her face, but her eyes were still strong as before.

James Okonkwo looked at this thing, shook his head and said it shall not be. You know that James Okonkwo does not hear that twelve is striking, what more with wine in his eyes. What did Police mean to him? My leopard! He rose when he saw Adaogu about to bolt out and went and blocked the door. Again he spoke: "Go back, Adaogu. Go back and tell your daughter the truth!"

People did not allow Adaogu to speak again. But if they did not hold her she would have slapped James as they used to slap their men in Ala Bekee. Agwu was in her eyes. If you looked at her, she was frantic like a mad cow. People held her. They held her until her daughter came. Poor girl, her eyes were swollen as if she had cried for seven moons. There was nothing else in her throat only tears and words the wind scattered.

What else shall I say? That was how Batday ended that day. It did not take another day and Adaogu sent back her daughter home, and she is still there in town making miss, and this thing we are talking here does not reach her there. It is her daughter that is dying, she who has called her own mother "Anty" and will never know her father; she who will live haunted by what her mother went and did. What else shall I say? Adaogu is there.