Artistic Synergism and Disruptive Continuity in Nol Alembong's "The Beginning"

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Artistic Synergism and Disruptive Continuity: Narrative Intertextuality in Nol Alembong’s “The Beginning”

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Abstract  
The analytical trajectory of this paper narrows the general, complex and complicated spectrum of intertextuality discourses to a form of intertextual reworking and playfulness, which is called narrative intertextuality. It examines the intertextual matrix upon which the Anglophone Cameroon poet, Nol Alembong, engages a dialogue between texts from different cultural, mythological, philosophical and narratological perspectives. Through textual exegeses of the short poem “The Beginning”, this paper argues that Alembong develops a poetic narrative on the frame of older narratives not necessarily to invite the reader to contemplate the old text but intriguingly to situate the poetic piece within the collective matrix of literary tradition. Grounded on the intertextual narratology of Moyise, the assimilationist features of Abrams intertextuality, and Bloomian misreading and misprision, the paper concludes that Alembong’s poem creates synergetic connections and regenerates analytical energies on issues that lie sombre in the postcolonial imagination. In its self-reflexivity, the poem perpetuates a narratological form but undercuts the very thematic essence of the texts with which it dialogues.  
Keywords: Intertextuality, Narratology, Anglophone Poetry, Biblical texts, Nol Alembong

Introduction  
A careful reading of the poetry of Nol Alembong is likely to reveal several forms and manners of intertextuality.
Alembong’s intertextuality connectivity is evident in his ability to neatly connect his poetic texts to traditional wisdom derived from the communal repertoire or collective archive of his people. It is important to note that Alembong is essentially an oral traditional poet transcribing cultural wisdom into written poetic texts. While “works of literature, after all, are built from systems, codes and traditions, established by previous works of literature” (Allen 200:1) to which one can easily attribute ownership and authorship, in oral traditional poetry such systems, codes and traditions are communally owned and shared thereby blurring prospects of ownership and authorship. His intertextuality is also evident in the (in)direct synergy between his poetic texts and precursor texts from varied centres of culture and knowledge which comes across through easily perceptible references or playful reworking. Thus, to understand Alembong’s poetry, it is inevitable for the critic to engage a comprehensive hermeneutical process while maintaining a perceptual view of the poetics of the text.

The analytical trajectory of this paper narrows the general, complex and complicated spectrum of intertextuality discourses to a form of intertextual reworking and playfulness, which is called narrative intertextuality. It examines the intertextual matrix upon which the Anglophone Cameroon poet, Nol Alembong, engages a dialogue between several texts from the perspective of narratology. Through textual exegeses of the short poem “The Beginning”, the paper shows how Alembong’s poetic narrative is developed on the frame of older narratives not necessarily to invite the reader to contemplate the old text but to ground his poetic piece within the collective mind of literary tradition. This is what Thomas S. Eliot refers to as “simultaneous order” in his discourse about the historical sense that all poets share (Eliot, “Tradition”, 14). What this poem does is that it readjusts the “ideal order” amongst “existing monuments [texts]” (Eliot, 15) and so becomes part of the “simultaneous existence” (Eliot, 14) which to Eliot is the process of literary tradition. The new story, in the poem, is told in a completely new context and with a completely new thematic focus yet on the frame of an old story thereby giving ‘life’ to the old story. This is possibly why
Eliot thinks that it is not “preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (Eliot, 15).

The presence of biblical texts in Alembong’s poetic texts is a pretty frequent occurrence. For example in the poem “Christmas Chicken”, he attracts the reader with the Christian focused title but engages a poetic treatise that places the traditional sacrifice of fowls on equal planes with the Christian sacrifice made by Jesus Christ. Andrew Ngeh and Nformi Dominic Nganyu note that “To the poet, [Alembong] the killing of a chicken in an African society and the death of Jesus Christ perform the same function” (22). While the connection in this poem is metaphorical, in other poems, it takes the form of allusions. The first instinct then is to carry out a broad study of several poems under the general category of intertextuality. The inclination to use a single poem as the corpus for this paper is purposeful and strategic. My penchant is always to avoid generalized discussions of poetry and to consider each poem as “rare moments of spirit” that generates unique and commodious artistic energy and that deserves to be judiciously analysed in its own right. In relation to the choice of “The Beginning”, the poem provides a unique template for understanding narrative intertextuality. Secondly, intertextuality is such a complex and intriguing perspective and focusing on a single text gives ample space for detailed analytical examination of the various nuances and textual dialogues that the text generates.

Reframing the Discourse

Every text is a “flirtatious text” (Barthes 6) which seduces the reader to read it but also to transcend it and engage in similar exercises of pleasure with other texts that inform, influence, shape or is shaped by it. This probably is why in “evaluating the works of our modernity: their value would proceed from their duplicity” (Barthes 7). While Barthes considers duplicity in terms

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of the “two edges”, it can also be understood in terms of every form of duplicate that the text makes, by which I mean the various textual correspondences which the text creates or generates. These textual correspondences provide grounds for the multiple layers of meaning critics uncover as they read the text within different cultural context and discursive frames. Alembong’s *Forest Echoes*, has generated some interesting critical discourses.

Charles Teke analyses “The Beginning” amongst others within the conceptual framework of ecological discourse with particular emphasis on the eco-existential matrix of the “forest as forest” and the “forest as human consciousness”. Conceptualizing and contextualizing the collection within eco-existentialist mindset, Teke writes: “Alembong’s collection offers deep philosophical reflection on man’s state, discerned from the subtle inter-implication between metaphors of forest and human ir/rationality.” (Teke, 2015:44). This conceptualization of the collection is a testimonial to the poetic competence of Alembong as he ingeniously weaves the harmonious yet discordant world of human reality in rich natural and ecological imagistic patterns. Teke’s assiduous interpretation of the poem argues that “[t]he forest is shown to have had an established natural order before the creation of man. The emphasis on the fire that came leaves the poem in suspension and strategic open-ended invitation to diverse trajectories of interpretation” (Teke, 47). The “diverse trajectories of interpretation” which Teke talks about is a wide continuum of meaning creation and unremitting textual rewriting to which this paper contributes.

Teke’s niftily crafted and interpretatively sound paper, synchronizes with the critical discourse of Gamal Muhammad A. Elgezeery whose analyses situates *Forest Echoes* in the context of cross-referentiality between human culture and nature, and Oscar C. Labang who considers the forest in terms of nationalism and nationhood. Writing about “The Beginning”, Labang notes that the intertextual echoes make connections between the Cameroonian context and the Jewish context in the biblical text. Labang argues that the:
first three lines of the poem establish an intertextual link between Alembong’s allegory of the beginning and that of John in the Gospel of John. The dialogue between both texts is that which seeks to give a definitive meaning to the value that existed “in the beginning”. The biblical pattern from the Gospel of John Chapter 1:1 onward is replicated here to give a clear focus to the idea of a beginning in the forest. (20)

Labang’s analysis here focuses principally on the link between the poem and the Gospel text in John. The intertextual link with the Genesis passage at the very beginning of the Bible is not discussed or used in the metaphor of nationhood in Labang’s discourse. The present study takes the discourse further and examines these interconnections and how they function in an intertextual matrix.

Using the type of intertextuality which Steve Moyise (2002) describes as narrative intertextuality, the paper engages a re-reading of the poem and examines the various connections it has with other texts or discourses that evoke similar thematic preoccupations. According to Moyise, “Narrative intertextuality shows the importance of stories shaping the way we think and the way we express ourselves” (422). The self-expression is within the context of storytelling as each telling is a form of retelling which invites the reader to contemplate the old story and at the same time celebrate the new story. Moyise states “Narrative intertextuality then emphasises both the continuing role of a significant story, while also acknowledging that each new retelling is in some sense a reshaping of that story” (Moyise, 422). The precursor text is what Moyise refers to as “significant story” and this is very often a meta-narrative or canonical text which has shaped cultural memory in momentous ways.

Although the definition of narrative intertextuality provides contextual grounds for the interpretation and understanding of the poem, M. H. Abrams’s definition of intertextuality in the *Glossary of Literary Terms* provides a
broader logical frame for an intertextual reading. Abrams views intertextuality as a creative process with multiple signifying energies typified by inescapable connections between texts. From his point of view, intertextuality signifies the multiple ways in which any one literary text echoes, or is inescapably linked to, other texts, whether by open or covert citations and allusions, or by the assimilation of the feature of an earlier text by a later text, or simply by participation in a common stock of literary codes and conventions (200).

Abram's idea of the “assimilation of the feature of an earlier text” is particularly relevant to this discourse because narrative intertextuality as articulated in this paper deals with the poet's adoption, absorption and reworking of earlier narrative frames and his ability to make the old story to resonate with polemical issues in his postcolonial linguistic and cultural context.

In Bloomian intertextual parlance, the retelling of a significant or the assimilation of features from a canonical story is a process of “misreading” and “misprision” which generates an “influence-relation” (A Map of Misreading, 3) between the texts thereby making them to share a synergetic and symbiotic cultural space. Charles Teke adroitly states in “Mapping the Influence”, that the younger poet, in this case Alembong, is “[s]wayed and overwhelmed by creative intoxication from precursors” (Teke, 4) and so he engages in a creative rereading process “to counter this influence by first being enmeshed in it, and second swerving away” (Teke, 4). Alembong’s narrative intertextual connections are complex and complicated because they do not directly involve a retelling or rereading which Moyise and Bloom conceptualize; rather the connections are built on an uncommon borrowing not of idea or pattern but of narrative frame. However, Moyise’s idea of narrative intertextuality, Abrams postulation about the adoption of features of earlier texts and Bloom’s concept of misreading and “influence-relation”, provide sound theoretical angles from which one can understand how Alembong uses an old biblical story as the frame for a postcolonial poetic narrative.
Textual Misreading: Continuity and/or Disruption

Narrative intertextuality involves a form of continuity as the frame of an old text is brought back to light at a different time and in a new context. The old text is regenerated and given significance in the context of the new text. This is what Julia Kristeva refers to when she says every text is mosaic network of quotes and reference; and that texts absorb and transform each other (“Word, Dialogue and Novel”, 37). Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein see this process as a form of neutralization of texts: “In the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (29). This therefore suggests that when a text appears in a new context/text, it generates tension, contradiction and assimilation.

From the analytical viewpoint of continuity, the poem is part of the historicity of colonialism and its legacy. The intertextual reference to colonial history revives not just the facts but also the debate about colonization. By engaging intertextual connections with colonialism in a postcolonial and global context, Alembong points to the relevance of the colonial past in the understanding of the postcolonial present and its perplexing dilemmas. It is a continuation of discourses that examine colonialism and, as a text, the poem communicates a unique point of view.

The title of the poem is a direct quotation from the biblical texts that the poem transforms and/or disrupts. Interestingly, the poem intertexts with two different biblical passages. In the King James Version of the Bible, the text from Genesis 1:1 reads “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” and the one from the Gospel of John reads “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Chapter 1:1). The words from the title and the opening line of the poem are apparently direct quotation from the two texts by Moses and John. However, the narrative pattern that the poem adopts is more closely associated to the text from John’s Gospel. Since every retelling is a process of transformation, the rest of the text that follow the title and the
first line considerably alter the context and meaning of what John refers to when he talks about the beginning. In this context, Alembong uses John’s words as a narrative frame on which to tell his own version of the beginning. There is therefore what Moyise considers to be part of the agenda of narrative intertextuality; that is the text shapes the way the reader thinks about it and also point to the importance of precursor text. It is almost absolutely impossible to read Alembong’s poem without immediately considering the role or relevance of John’s text. Reading the poetic text in line with the biblical text; and understanding the meaning of the present text in line with the source text provides for asynergetic and cyclical reading of texts.

The intertextual link with colonial history provides a base for the reading of the precolonial history of Africa. The interpretation and understanding of the poetic philosophy can come to full grasp if the reader yields to the invitation of the poetic text to read precolonial African history. The line from the poem which says “The forest was one” refers to Africa before the 1884 balkanization and separation of its territory into smaller colonizeable and exploitable entities. Although Africa was not a unified territory because of the multiple ethnic and religious groupings, Africa was not fifty-four countries. The poet’s argument is far from suggesting that Africa was a solidly united continent. On the contrary, the text seems to suggest that compared to postcolonial Africa, the precolonial African sphere was more cohesive. The text therefore provides new grounds for a continuation of discussions on the form and nature of Africa before colonization.

The poetic text attracts topicality towards the precolonial condition of Africa by echoing previous texts that have discoursed similar issues. At the same time, it blocks, disrupts and rewrites some of these texts. One of the methods through which this is done is by emphasizing the philosophy of the present text over that of the source text. In the context of Alembong’s “The Beginning”, there is an overwhelming emphasis on the oneness of the forest. The entire second stanza concentrates on the unified nature of the forest (Africa) before the encroachment of the destructive fire (Europe). The text goes
beyond an invitation for the reader to (re)read African history. It challenges the reader to rethink this history in the light of the philosophy that the poetic text provides. The highly personified dimension of the forest “It had one head. / It had one mouth. / It had one eye. / It had one ear.” (1) is intended to provide mental associates that should accompany the process of rethinking.

It is also a disruptive and intrusive process as the story build upon the old narrative structure and technically ruptures the old text completely while using its frame. There is a retelling that involves a reshaping and it is in this process that the new text is able to negotiate a space in the context of cultural texts. The intertextual reference to African historicity also serves as a form of disruption as it seeks to counter other historical narratives and perspectives. The poem therefore becomes an example of what Roland Barthes talks about in *The Pleasure of the Text* when he says “everything is attacked, dismantled” (7). The poem creates a context where “ideological structures, intellectual solidarities, the propriety of idioms, and even the sacred armature of syntax” (Barthes, 7) are all disrupted and there is a total ideological shift as the syntactic structure is altered to give ‘life’ to a new poem.

Another means through which disruption occurs is the rewriting of precursor texts either consciously or unconsciously. The metaphor of Africa as a forest has intertextual relevance and connection to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Both texts written within different cultures, contexts and historical timeframes, and even in different genres, are part of the same repertoire of texts that have engaged with discourses on colonialism. However, both texts interpret the same reality from different viewpoints. Alembong’s forest and Conrad’s jungle are images of the same place – Africa. While the forest is a positive celebration of the verdure and magnificence of the landscape prior to European invasion, the jungle is a negative projective of the African landscape and its people. Viewed from the perspectives of social/geographical distance and the proximity of the interpreter to reality; and placed in Alembong’s poetic philosophy of spectatorial distance as enunciated in the poem “Forest”, one would agree with Chinua Achebe that Conrad’s
presentation of Africa results from an attempt to interpret a sociocultural ecosphere that he does not comprehend. Alembong’s response to Conrad which finds echoes in “The Beginning” solidifies in “Forest” where he dedicates the last three stanzas in presenting what the forest means depending on the position of the viewer.

A forest is a jungle
To those who see it from without;
When in, we learn that
The parrot will lose its eyes to the night
Should it try to mimic the owl. (2-3)

Conrad’s Eurocentric interpretation and view of the forest as a jungle results from the fact that he is more of spectator that one of the elemental forces – human and non-human – that are intrinsically and intricately connected to the forest. Alembong’s poetic intertextual dialogues are responses to a deliberate Western psychological process that “set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest (Achebe, “An Image of Africa”, 2). Unlike Conrad, a product of this Western psychology, “who see it from without” (Alembong, 2) and calls it a jungle, Alembong is a product of this cultural ecosphere and so see a rather harmonious world where even the birds understand their rule and place in the natural order.

The images of the “forest” and “fire” represent two oppositional and conflicting forces which symbolize the binarism of the colonized and the colonizer. Metaphorically, the text revisits colonialism, projecting its cause in the image of forest and its consequences in the image of fire. Colonialism was inspired by the need for raw material to feed the growing industrial demand in Europe. The image of the forest is generally symbolic of everything in Africa that attracted European invasion. The consequence of this invasion is the destruction of African resources and the disruption of its cultural evolution. The impression one gets from reading the text is that the fire disrupted the harmony of the forest. Such a discourse counters and disrupts previous texts which claim that colonization was a European
attempt to bring or introduce light to the dark regions of the earth. Alembong, like other African writers, shows that European incursion was rather a disruptive process that stalled the natural development of African cultures and way of life. That is what Emmanuel Fru Doh considers *Forest Echoes* to be “a literary quilt revealing a mature poet bestriding generations as he patches together a people's culture, their philosophy, history, along with their attendant woes into a subtle, sometimes disillusioning even, yet purposeful and poignant whole” (“Introduction”, i). Achebe has argued vehemently that Africa had a culture and “did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans” and that African societies had their own ideologies and philosophies grounded in their values, and the depth and beauty of their cultural worldview was encapsulated in their poetry (Innes and Lindfors, 65). The dignity of African societies before the intrusion of Europeans is to Achebe one of the greatest values that Africans had, and of course this is one of the values that Europeans were bent on destroying. Alembong’s poem therefore aligns with Achebe’s discourse to disrupt European meta-narratives that denigrate Africa and make it look like it did not have any cultural systems before colonization.

**Intertextual Symbiosis and Mytho-poetic Connections**

The connection between the biblical texts and the poetic text in question is more profound and generates multiple layers of textual and interpretive perspectives than an ordinary reading can uncover. While the biblical texts are meta-narratives that have established canonicity, the poetic text simply lingers in the oblivion of unknown texts. Yet, these texts now inhabit the same textual space and must generate collaborative warmth because to understand the poem without the biblical texts is impossible. The poetic text and the biblical texts all exist at different levels but they all participate in a process of narration, creation and reordering of a cosmos in a particular geo-localized space and historical context.

The intertextual relationship between the poetic text and the biblical text creates a context of transtemporality as the poetic
text reintroduces the biblical text to the consciousness of the reader and evokes an ongoing discourse based on the mutuality and symbiosis of the texts. The poetic text survives through its allusion, adaptation and parody of the biblical texts; and the biblical texts gain new and refreshing analytical and critical attractions through the new life that the poetic text gives them. The poetic text generates new focus on the various biblical texts and so brings new depth, memory and meaning to the biblical texts which are now reread in the context. Having read both biblical texts several times, as a Christian, the levels of depth and meaning with which I read them now is completely different. This is because the readings are no longer informed solely by the theological basis provided by faith but by the philosophical trajectories suggested by the poetic text. This re-entry into the world of John’s Gospel and the Genesis story is triggered not by a determination to seek answers to or understand faith questions. Rather, it is an invitation to understand the dynamics of the relationship between texts that I have known and read several times, and a new text that I have just encountered. This dynamics and the positive energy of rereading in a new light is what produce Barthesian “plaisir and jouissance” in intertextual readings.

Intertextually, Alembong’s poem can also be placed in the cultural context of narrative-of-beginning. Narrative-of-beginning here refers to creation myths, that is, narratives that trace the beginning of a people or culture. The biblical text from the Gospel of John is set within the Judeo-Christian philosophy and seems to be a rewriting of the Old Testament narrative of creation. As mentioned earlier, the title and first line of the poem “In the beginning” intertexts with two different biblical texts from Genesis and John, and the narrative structure of the poem is more inclined to the text from John’s Gospel. On the other hand, within the matrix of narrative-of-beginning, the title and first line of the point find intertextual relevance with the first sentence in the bible - “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The poem, therefore, participates in a larger narrative culture where texts are used to trace, create, reorder or mythologize the origin of different phenomena.
Alembong is not retelling any of the biblical stories; he is not parodying the story; he is recreating the story thereby participating in a creative continuum of texts that explain different beginnings. Grounded in the mythical postulations of T.S. Eliot, the poem is part of the mythic method which is “…simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.” (Eliot, 178). Manjola Nası observes that the importance of Eliot’s mythic method lies in the fact that it “provides order, a way of organizing the various elements of the literary work without employing the rigid rules of fixed and/or closed structures, the verbose elaborations of the narrative method and all its connective restrictions” (Nasi, 2). This process of reordering is central to the biblical texts and implied in the poetic text. In the Genesis text, God reorders a chaotic universe into what becomes the celestial Garden of Eden. In the Gospel texts, John reverses the original biblical creation and gives emphasis not to what was created but to the word that created it and the Word that uttered the creating word, in which case there is the reordering of both creation and the text that orchestrates it. In the poetic text, the harmonious existence of the forest is destabilized by the appearance of the fire. The fire reorders the existential condition of the forest, and the elliptical ending of the poem suggests possibilities of further reordering. Essentially, therefore, the narrative-of-beginning (creation myth) is not about the beginning; it is about reordering the cosmos at a point in time and giving it legitimacy through narrative power, and the texts within this intertextual matrix all conform to this mythic method. The narratives engage the harmonization of a particular space in time, which involves a transformation from chaos to cosmos. In Genesis, it takes the form of a garden and in the poem it is a forest.

“In the beginning” has a time referent that is also fundamental in grasping the connection between the texts and the message of the poem. Unlike the biblical text from Genesis, the poetic text does not go back in time. The genesis story is clearly situated in the beginning of humanity. It deals with questions of
how everything including human beings found themselves in the space they call earth. The narrative is framed within a short time span – possible the period between European discovery that Africa has the raw material that its growing industries need and their actual arrival and partition of Africa. It explains the bliss of the precolonial world, the beginning of colonial intrusion and woes, and then projects into postcolonial traumas and dilemmas. When Alembong says “In the beginning”, the question is: the beginning of what? The linguistic economy of poetic expression leaves the poet with fewer than imagined options to fully develop the story. Nonetheless, the poetic text aptly captures a time frame that starts with the sudden realization that there is forest and the appearance of the fire. The reader is abandoned in elliptical space to determine what the fire does to the forest. As Oscar Labang argues, this technique includes the reader in the process of writing the text or creating meaning. He writes:

Instead of pinpointing a particular ill, the poet chooses to leave the poem open ended thereby inviting the reader to be part of the writing process. The reader has the responsibility of completing the poem as the elliptical ending “…does not suggest anything in particular. Any reader can therefore attribute any colonial ill to the fire. (23)

The ellipses can be seen in terms of the mystery of meaning, in the context of the biblical text with which the poem intertexts. What does the text really say and how can the ellipses evoke meaning where meaning is never meaning but only part of a complex network of meanings.

The image of the “fire” in Alembong's poem can also be interpreted from the perspective of archetypes because according to Vincent B. Leitch “a chip or piece of an older monument appears” in another work as “source, influence, allusion, imitation, archetype or parody” (123). Fire represents different things to different people and cultures. As an archetypal image, it has several ramifications as a purifier, a destroyer and as the generative power of life, energy and change. From one perspective, it represents enlightenment, renewal, spirituality and
from another it represents destruction and damnation. This means that it has both positive and negative connotations depending on the context in which it is used. In this poem and the postcolonial experience which it denotes, fire has a more negative connotation. It is seen as a force that consumes the forest and creates chaos which breaks down the cosmic elements that make the forest a unified entity. This translates into the Western cultures that disrupted the natural evolution of African culture by imposing foreign ideologies and cultural practices on the people.

Conclusion

From a general perspective, Nol Alembong is apparently one of those poets who do not fit within the artistic frames defined by Shadrach Ambanasom when he divides Anglophone Cameroonians writers into political activist and liberal humanists and calls for a mutual co-existence of both groups (“Preface”, vi). While Alembong’s poetry is densely characterized by strong political vibrations, the message is carefully packaged in traditional and cultural images that necessitate mindful analytical unpacking. His mellow political engagement can easily evade a critic if s/he does not read the poems “With the same spirit that its author writ” (Alexander Pope, Essay on Criticism, line 236). On the other hand, Alembong’s humanism is distinct from that of several poets including Ambanasom who is seemingly trapped in the liberal humanist frame which he describes. Alembong’s humanism does not come across through the banal, prosaic and predictable type of poetry that many Cameroonian poets write. It has a strong element of Soul – a certain incorporeal, mythological, philosophical and cultural essence, which ties not just to man and nature or man and politics but to a more supreme culturally cultivated force. It is this Soul that elevates a poem like “The Beginning” and creates a mythological synergism between the poetic text and the biblical texts.

Within the edging of the analyses, Nol Alembong is what Bloom describes as a “strong poet”; one who has the “capable imagination” (The Anxiety, 5) to appropriate biblical narratives to his own use by not merely retelling the stories but giving them a
completely new narrative essence. Through this poetic misreading, Alembong creates space for the poem in the imaginative sphere. The poem divides the mind of the reader and directs it towards two different targets. The first is that the reader is made to remember and revisit an old story, and the second is that the reader is taken back to an old text. The poem is both an act of retelling and rereading as the poet grapples with a story he knows and tries to narrate it in his context. In the act of rereading and retelling, he transforms the original text and takes it away from its context to the context he best understands. The reader therefore reads one text but understands and interprets two texts. He is present in the world of Alembong’s text, yet through creative and critical consciousness, he lives in the world of the text and the world from which the text burrows. While an intertextual reading yields a profound feeling of jouissance to the critic who understands the dynamics of the process, it also subjects the critic to the criticism of Wallace Stevens when he says: “But there is a kind of critic who spends his time dissecting what he reads for echoes, imitations, influences, as if no one was ever simply himself but is always compounded of a lot of other people” (qtd. in Bloom, 6).

The synergism, that is the collaborative connection between the poetic text and the biblical texts, brings about an artistic regeneration which is both continuous and disruptive. There are enormous complexities that surround the cultural, historical and literary traditions upon which Alembong’s poetic art depends. As a postcolonial poet, his poetry feeds not simply on the political sphere of his current existence but also on the history of cultural domination that Africa has suffered. The quintessence of being a postcolonial subject requires immense and broad understanding of issues that affect the poet and that interact with his poetic consciousness directly or indirectly. As a traditional Chief and custodian of culture, and at the same time a poet, scholar and teacher, in an increasingly Christianised society, Alembong, like most other postcolonial writers, straddles complex worlds. While it is easy to comprehend the overwhelming use of oral and cultural poetics in his poetry, the presence of allusions, adaptations and images from Christianity is
quizzical. It however, reveals the hybrid identity of the poet as a traditionalist trapped in a world contaminated by Western religious influence. Just as Western religions feed on Traditional African religions, the reverse is also true. The intertextuality of the poetic and the biblical text, and the symbiotic relation is pretty much a reflection of the dualism inherent in the personality of the poet.

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