

# A Reader-Response Exploration of Neuroaesthetics as Signifying Structure in Kwame Dawes' *Duppy Conqueror*

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## Abstract

This study titled "A Reader-Response Exploration of Neuroaesthetics as Signifying Structures in Kwame Dawes' *Duppy Conqueror*" offers alternative perspective to the aesthetic hermeneutics which, it demonstrates, is fundamental not only to scholarship but also to the epistemic space. It is set on the assumption that while earlier works on aesthetic ontology by I. A Richards, Eliot, Empson, Leavis, among others, set responded to question regarding structural, ideological and procedural issue, it examines the challenge posed by the relationship between language and the human mind and the way in aesthetics can be apprehended from psychic markers. It points that the application of the lenses of the Reader-Response theory to paradigms of Neuroaesthetics demonstrate ways in which alternative procedure for advancing the aesthetic question can be realized using poetic text. Through the qualitative approach the paper finds that the reading process can account for the mental operations of the reader as well as the markers that aid the perception of poetic text. By doing this, the paper concludes that psychic markers proposed by Neuroaesthetics are viable tools for understanding signifying structures that influence the perception and interpretation of poetic texts.

**Keywords:** Neuroaesthetics, Reader-Response, Signification, Aesthetic, Hermeneutics, Tonality, Symbolic Evidence

## 1.0 Introduction

This paper titled "A Reader-Response Exploration of Neuroaesthetics Signifying Structures in Kwame Dawes' *Duppy Conqueror*" deploys the poetics of Neuroaesthetics to literary text to offer alternative perspective on the relationship between the aesthetic question and the human mind and subjectivity. Turning to Neuroaesthetics as mode of re-signification is essential as it reignites discussions on the aesthetic hermeneutics which is fundamental not only to literary scholarship but also to the epistemic space. While earlier works on aesthetics responded to questions regarding structural, ideological and procedural issues, the present study examines the challenge posed by the relationship between language and the human mind and the way in which aesthetics can be apprehended from psychic markers.

Set within literary discourse, Neuroaesthetics offers alternative approach to the aesthetic hermeneutics which is central not only to literary scholarship but also to the epistemic space. Aesthetic ontology, as Eagleton (1990) observes, grants access to canvass of discourses especially within grand narratives – History, Philosophy, Religion and Literature – within which modern European thoughts are shaped. Both creative and critical efforts, in Arnold's conceptualization, beginning especially from Plato to the poststructuralist period, were idealized on and discussed within the aesthetic hermeneutics question. These ideations have expanded epistemic boundaries in the ways in which their subject matters are (re)defined within ideological constructs and procedural conceptions.

This dialectic modulations within the literary space, for instance, was sparked by Plato's dismissal of art as harmful to society based largely on aesthetic consideration. Within Plato's formulation, as Shaftesbury explains it, is the idea that "Nature is itself the supreme artefact, brim-full with all possibilities of being; and to know it is to share in both the creativity and the sublime disinterestedness of its Maker" (quoted in Eagleton, 1990:35). The aesthetic question, for Aristotle, transcends the objective representation of things in Plato's ideation. To him, the world of things – Nature – and even "scientific knowledge of objective reality are grounded in [the] intuitive pre-giveness of things to the vulnerably perceptive body, in the primordial physicality of our-being-in-the-world" (Eagleton, 1990:18, my addition). This idea offered novel way of thinking about art as it gives the subjective being – the third voice which Plato dismissed – the autonomy to occupy centre stage and, by this, reoccupy the autonomous space, like the theological Maker, and represents a world which can be self-referring. By privileging subjecthood in aesthetic discourse Aristotle opened the ideological ground not only for epistemic engagement but for the institutionalization of Western thoughts which lead to the rise of Englishness.

Ideas advanced by eighteenth century philosophers such as Hegel, Kant, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Marx, among others, were shaped by Aristotle's postulations on the aesthetic ontology. For Kant, as Eagleton (1990:1) summarizes it, the aesthetics holds out a promise of reconciliation between Nature and humanity. Aesthetics, for Kierkegaard, must yield ground to the higher truths of ethics and religious faith. For Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, what constitutes aesthetic experience is the ability to represent a supreme form of truth. For Hegel and John Stuart Mill, as Ward (2001:2) expresses it, art must embody perfection. Within the discursive framing of these philosophers is the conceptualization of aesthetics as ideological construct aimed at engaging with ideals of morality and restraint.

The debate on the viability of literature within the epistemic space of the nineteenth century further sparked discussions that shaped theoretical constructs on the aesthetic question. Barry

(2002:n.p.) traces this debate that shifted attention of scholars on the aesthetic question from ideology to procedural to the Convocation speech made by Professor Edward Freeman in Oxford in 1887 where he challenged the assessment criteria of literary studies especially its inability to examine the phenomenon it sets as components of aesthetic engagement, namely taste, sympathy and the ability to enlarge the mind. To him literature does not offer examiners the technical and positive information to examine.

This submission triggered responses on the aesthetic question that shaped theoretical constructs of literary studies which began with Matthew Arnold in the 1850s into the 1920s "with the publication of Newbolt Report on the Teaching of English in 1921" (Barry, 2002:n.p). Aware of these debates, the Cambridge English School with scholars such as I. A. Richards (as seen in *Practical Criticism* 1921), William Empson (as seen in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* 1930), and F.R. Leavis (as seen in *Scrutiny*) pioneered methods that isolated literary studies "from language studies, from historical considerations and from philosophical questions" (Barry, 2002:n.p). For Richards, as captured in *Practical Criticism*, aesthetic issues within the literary space should focus on excavating loftiness, profundity and sensitivity procedurally through 'the words on the page'. And so, as seen from his disquisitions and those of his students, the aesthetic question shifted from history and context to language and form as a way of understanding the relationships between form and object, *fabula* and *syuzhet*; a method that offers an objective and precise way of arriving at textual meaning.

Discourses within the late twentieth century re-establish the aesthetic question within the connections between literary studies and these three academic fields – language, history and philosophy. Questions on ideologies about human sensibilities, and the perception as well as representation of reality took centre stage in setting paradigm for discussing aesthetics. Within this ideology Geertz (1976:1473) problematized the formalist idea that "...a poem must not mean but be" largely because, to him, literary scholarship should jettison the idea that "the whole secret of aesthetic power is located in the formal relations among sounds, images, volumes, themes, or gestures". The aesthetic

question, to him, should be located within “the context of human purpose and the pattern of experience they collectively sustain” (Geertz, 1976:1475). In this sense, the study of art form is to explore a sensibility which is essentially a collective formation of social existence. This idea moves the notion of aesthetics away from the functionalist view or what he calls “the spiritualization of the technical” to serving as “mechanism for defining social relationships, sustaining social rules and strengthening social values (Geertz, 1976:1475). The emergence of cultural oriented or context-based theories such as Postcolonialism, Feminism, New Historicism establish notions of aesthetics within hermeneutics that explore the general course of social life.

Neuroaesthetics offers an alternative response to the aesthetic question within the discursive frame of literary studies. It provides procedural approach for understanding the connections between language, literature, and the human mind and how aesthetic issues can be apprehended from the perception of psychic markers. Neuroaesthetics is driven by the assumption, among others, that literary language can trigger the reader's mind and enable them to unknot some latent experiences within texts in a way that will (re)ignite their ‘consciousness’ or ‘awareness’ of the world not only of the text but the one around them. This goes to say, therefore, that meaning-making, from the point of view of Neuroaesthetics, is largely a space of imaginative [re]engagement which, as Carroll (2012:299) maintains, “is a common-language term for a combined set of mental operations that involve mental imagery, rational thinking, narrative structures, and aesthetic responsiveness”. It is the ability to recover these symmetry of experiences – of recovered emotions, socio-cultural and religious realities among others – embossed in a literary work that coalesce into and constitute aesthetics. These experiences, in themselves, do not only spur the brain to understand the working of the text but, by doing so, participate in shaping ideas that will make the reader to perceive the world better.

Earlier literary engagements within the field of Neuroaesthetics were aimed primarily at arguing for the inclusion of literature as tool for exploring the human mind. Their argument is that like

painting, music and dance, which are considered as ‘discernible’ art forms as their effects can be measured with relative ease, literature, as reading practice, can also participate in this epistemic engagement as it is “mostly, and in most forms, a visual act” (Burke, 2015:2). The type of visualization it employs, Burke (2015:2) argues,

is different to the vision involved in pictorial art interfaces. Unlike viewing a painting in the world, there is no discernible object out there for light to bounce off and strike the retina. There are just words on the page or screen: those small simple culturally-determined semiotic signs... This is the process that involves semantic neural solutions. It is the meaning of the word form that matters and its immediate and subsequent context, not the form itself. There is also the fact that written literary input is also represented in mental imagery.

Burke's argument opens up literature as a feasible platform from which the human mind can be explored. This is because literary reading is a neural process by which words are processed through the mind, perceived through visual cortex and interpreted according to the reader's ability to pin down context which, itself, is localized or traceable within several semiotic signs that are not directly available to the sensory organ in the simplistic one-to-one fashion. This is why literary reading, as Burke (2011:56) maintains, induces mental imagery which may be fleeting and indistinct, but when it appears it is robust and recyclable. The point to note in Burke's argument is that literary reading is, like other arts, impressionistic – it imbues emotion, shapes beliefs, and conditions the mind to think in a predetermined direction. This further explains why Varela et al (1991:173) note that “cognition depends to an important extent, on the kinds of experiences that our bodies undergo in cultural context”.

Pointedly, the phenomenological approach to literary criticism provides the template from which “the brain processes that normally underlie the interaction of the human being with the world are reflected forcefully and in condensed manner” (Turner, 2019:185). Neuroaesthetics, as this paper demonstrates, can be engaged through this approach to literary criticism particularly as it

creates the platform for engaging with specific aesthetic phenomenon by considering the complexities in which they are grounded. The activities of the brain are influenced by the body, environment, and history which, according to Gambino and Pulvirenti (2019:185-186), are produced and nourished by reason and emotion, matter and energy, reality and representation. The new approach to literary criticism which Gambino and Pulvirenti (2019:186) call “neurohermeneutic approach to literary criticism”, in their words,

...aims to contribute to the current debate about the linkage between literary, cognitive and neuroscientific studies, focusing on the relationship between mindbrain's processes mirrored in the formal features of the text and the strategies activated by a text in order to involve the reader in imagining, emotionally feeling and cognitively getting meanings out of the literary experience.

This new literary engagement opens up more grounds for explaining the evolutionary relevance of approaching meaning-making in literary discourses using the phenomenological perspective. With this approach, literary texts can be investigated by exploring the text as “complex dynamic system, responsive to the functioning system of the human mind, and therefore, as a device for obtaining knowledge and constructing meaning” (Gambino and Pulvirenti, 2019:186).

In practice, readers track unfolding events of a story or make sense of a poetic piece through “situation model” (Miall, n.y:234). The reading process enables the reader to construct such models as Maill goes further to say, by “following the unfolding plot, experiencing verisimilitudes of the main character's actions and desires, often empathizing with a character” which eventually leads them into suspense, stir their curiosity, and arouse their feeling of surprise. When this is done, the reader is usually left to reflect on ways in which such text resonates with their own private experiences, reify their values, and re-establishes their culture. The concern of Neuroaesthetics is, by this explication, contingent upon ways in which readers experience insight into the meaning of their feelings. This is why, according to Carruthers and Smith (1996),

“literary reading ...facilitates investigation of the Theory of the Mind, providing support for the simulation account rather than the theory-theory account” (quoted in Miall, ny:236).

### **Reader Response as Theoretical Framework**

Aside from the influences of early classical critics such as Plato and Aristotle whose works on rhetoric placed the reader as centre of discourse, the twentieth century and the later poststructuralist scholars beginning especially with I.A Richard, L. M Rosenblatt, John Dewey, Eugene Garber, Gardner Howard, David Bleich, Gerald Prince, Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss, Michael Riffaterre, Jonathan Culler and, Stanley Fish, among others, have offered methodical approaches that have elevated the reader as the source of meaning in literary discourse. Although reader-oriented theory, like feminism, as Seldan (1985:125) rightly points out, “has no single or predominant philosophical starting point”, they all grant the reader the autonomy to function, in Fish's (1980) words, “as an actively mediating presence”. The propositions made in I.A Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1925) which was later advanced in Louise M. Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* (1937) and *The Reader, the Text and the Poem* (1978) turned attention of critics from the primacy of the text privileged by Formalism and New Criticism to the reading process itself. The works of these pioneer critics offer a logical defence for the need to reinsert the reader as a critical category in the signification of meaning in literary discourses.

The reader, in this sense, assumes a privileged status as agency for meaning-making. The most important contribution of Richards to reader-response as it came to shape poststructuralist discourses today is his proposition that:

...a reader brings to the text a vast array of ideas amassed through life's experiences, including previous literary experiences, and applies such information to the text. By so doing, the reader is no longer the passive receiver of knowledge but an active participant in the creation of a text's meaning (Bressler, 2003:58).

Within the framework of literary disquisition Richards' proposition empowers the reader in the convention of discourse. This new status gives the

reader an active role as agency of meaning-making. This is why Selden (1985:106) insisted that “the perceiver is active and not passive in the act of perception”. It is this position that grants Reader-Response the conceptual and even technical ground for engaging in the reading-interpretative continuum for which the nuances of Neuroaesthetics embraces.

The paradigms of Neuroaesthetics which are prominent in Reader-Response are particularly revealed in the works of two German critics; Wolfgang Iser and Hans Jauss especially in the way in which they foreground Reader-Response as a phenomenological procedure that privileges the reader's consciousness as the source of meaning. Considering ‘consciousness’ as ‘imagination’ Iser (1980:50) posits in “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach” that “literary text is...something like an arena in which reader and author participate in the game of imagination”. His position grants the reader equal status with the author as meaning-making agents with both considered as discursive structures in literary disquisition. As far as Iser is concerned the text should be considered in the same manner with the actions involved in responding to it. This, as he goes on to posit, is because signification is an arena of iteration by which:

The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader (Iser, 1981:189).

This dual status of the text – as the meeting point between the author and the reader – as ascribed by Iser, Abubakar (2023:30) notes, is

anchored on his perception of the text as a dual entity whose artistic integrity emanates from its being a product of a real author while its reception is done by a virtual reader who derives aesthetic experience through interaction with [the] text. This interactive bipolar structure demonstrates that both the text and the reader are phenomenologically implied constructs or tropes through which the text

is activated by the experience of the reader who in turn is constructed by the text's textuality.

These assumptions are important to the present study in a number of ways. They provide the link between Neuroaesthetics and literary studies in the way both fields focus on “the artistic and the esthetics: the artistic refers to the text created by the author and the esthetics the realisation accomplished by the reader” (Iser, 1980:50). Considered in Neuroaesthetics as effect that grants access to or subsets of cognition that triggers meaning in the human mind, aesthetics, in the reader oriented theory, as Iser (1980:50) theorises it, “is the virtuality of the work that gives rise to its dynamic nature, and this in turn is the precondition for the effects that the work calls forth”.

If one considers literary effects as “the reality of the text” that exert influence on “the individual disposition of the reader” as Iser points out, then the notion of aesthetics makes sense to this study especially when one considers it as collision of perspectives – not in the sense of disruption but conflation – in a manner that allows the reader to fill in gaps from “the various perspectives offered him by the text in order to relate the patterns and the ‘schematised views’ to one another”. It is this process, as Iser (1980:50) goes on to say, that “the reader sets the work in motion, and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of response within himself”. It is this form of reading, as Iser further notes, that “causes the literary work to unfold its inherently dynamic character”.

Poulet George's (1980:42) disquisition as captured in “Criticism and the Experience of Interiority” advances Iser's position by considering the literary text as “a rational being, of a consciousness; the consciousness of another”. This submission grants Reader-Response a viable ground for engaging in Bio-cultural discourse particularly in the way it considers the text as “purely mental entity” that triggers the reader's mind to images and words which create a universe that “is infinitely more elastic than the world of objective reality” (Poulet, 1980:43). This world, as Poulet (1980:43) goes further to explain it, “yields with little resistance to the importunities of the mind...this interior universe constituted by language does not seem radically opposed to the me who thinks it”. Here

lies the connection between Reader-Response and Neuroaesthetics: they both agree that the act of reading brings together and sometimes replaces the reader's consciousness with that of the author through mental images lying within the text. This is why he avers that "my consciousness behaves as though it were the consciousness of another" (Poulet, 1980:43). In a more elucidating manner, Poulet (1980:44) disarms both the author and reader of any claim to personalised consciousness which, he says, "merits reflection", namely, that "in a certain sense, I must recognise that no idea belongs to me. Ideas belong to no one. They pass from one mind to another as coins from hand to hand".

Norman N. Holland's (1980:124) "Unity Identity Text Self" makes Poulet's theoretical position clearer when he argues that interpretation is the unveiling of ideas in ways that will create or justify the identity of the reader. As arena of subjectivity, interpretation, as Holland (1980:123) points out, is purely "a function of identity, specifically identity conceived as variations upon an identity of themes." What is therefore conceived as 'theme' is literary practice is the concretisation of idea or, to put it in another way, the recovery of structures – linguistic, psychological, social, biological etc. – that reveals the material essence of the individual reader. What the reader does in as the act of reading is to "bring different kinds of external information to bear. Each will seek the particular theme that concerns him. Each will have different ways of making the text into an experience with a coherence and significance that satisfies" (Holland, 1980:123). The reader's source of satisfaction or what he calls sense – that which makes the reader "feel right" – in the words of Holland (1980:124) is when the reader is able to use the text "to organise and make coherent our own experience of that text or person".

Holland's theoretical disquisition grants access to the psychology of the reader to the extent that it shows ways in which the reader locates or replicates himself within the structures of control that are outside the text yet control the reader's ability to internalise the text that seeks to control his perception of things. Holland (1980:124) puts it more succinctly when he says:

the overarching principle is: identity re-creates itself. That is, all of us, as we read,

use the literary work to symbolise and finally to replicate ourselves. We work out through the text our own characteristic patterns of desire and adaptation. We interact with the work making it part of our own psychic economy and making ourselves part of the literary work – as we interpret it.

Explaining Holland's idea of 'identity theme as captured above, Selen (1985:122) observes that readers recast literary work to discover their own fears and wishes that shape their psychic lives. Understanding Holland's notion of identity theme in this way makes the conception of aesthetics more visible in the sense offered by Neuroaesthetics particular as it conceptualises the text as a space that creates its own unity in a manner that reflects the world. This world, to Holland (1980:119), "may not be unique: the same identity theme may describe several different people, just as a single literary theme might describe several different texts".

The reading process, in consequence, is the process of interpreting experiences in a manner that will enable the reader not only to come to terms but also to cope with the world. The governing poetics of Holland notion of Reader-Response is particularly seen in his idea that "each of us...finds in the literary work the kind of thing we characteristically wish or fear the most. Therefore, to respond, we need to be able to re-create from the literary work our characteristic strategies for dealing with those deep fears and wishes". Holland's ideation holds the reading process as a self-reflecting act by which the reader constructs his way of concretising what he wishes and defeating what he fears.

#### Neuroaesthetics and the Signifying Structures in Kwame Dawes' *Duppy Conqueror*

The present study is set to unveil aesthetic impulses within the domain of Neuroaesthetics using selected poems in Kwame Dawes' *Duppy Conqueror*. This part of the study unveils aesthetic impulses within the domain of Neuroaesthetics using Kwame Dawes' *Duppy Conqueror*. The notion of value – as judgement of taste – in literature, particularly in the framework of Neuroaesthetics, is apprehended within the purview of linguistic construct. It is realised in the way it provides or yields itself to some signifying

structures or aesthetic impulses (as Neuroaesthetics would prefer to call it) by which man can make sense both of himself and of the world around him. The models of signification or paradigms for communicating meaning to man, in this wise, are encoded in the textual space in a manner that provides the ground for assessing evolved systems by which notions of value are perceived as subsets of aesthetics in literary sense of the word. Literary artefacts, therefore, yield themselves to assessment criteria by which systems of value or the basis for judging same can be adduced independent of what one feels about them. It is even so, as Neuroaesthetics claims, when the text offers a simulacrum – a semblance on the bases of existing models – by which the human mind is conditioned to replicate or relate with as meaning-making structure.

The literary worth of a text to which value is ascribed, in aesthetic sense, is not always on the basis of the judgement of or perception about whether it encodes thoughts that are “right” and/or “wrong”. These ideas – of right and wrong – as Richards (1971:116) argues, are judged, in their strictest application, on the basis of “nuances of interest”. Rather, judgement of value are determined, in the words of Carroll (2004:163), “relative to the motivational and emotional dispositions of individual reader”. This, as Poulet (1980:43) explains it, is because the value of a text is adjudged from the importunities of the reader's mind from where the interior universe constituted by language does not seem radically opposed to that of the reader who thinks it. In effect, artistic judgement of value, as Carroll goes on to say, can be generalized on the basis of principles on which they are founded. That means, therefore, that even though the conception of value cannot be justified, it can be explained in aesthetic sense. The way the perception of value can be arrived at, in this sense, becomes the concern of Neuroaesthetics for which this study is anchored.

Some of the questions one might ask to explain this conception of value in literary texts are whether or not these texts show the quality of mind of the author and whether the motives for which the creative effort of the author is construed is plausible to the extent that it offers the template for understanding the human condition. While the first

question deals with the notion of causality, the second focuses on impression. Pointedly, the first raises the question of whether the text is structured in a way that could be said to have “provide[d] greater explanatory depth to our evaluative judgement, and connects these judgements with the whole larger network of empirical knowledge about human behaviour or cognition” (Carroll, 2004:162, my modification). The second questions the extent to which the motive projects the social circumstances of people in such a way that generates universal appeal. These, to a more informed reader especially of literature, becomes the basis upon which literary value and the perception of aesthetic effect are not only situated but also synthesized.

In this sense, the profundity of art and how its artistic merit is adjudged can be realised through some structures of signification outlined by Carroll (2004:169) namely: “tonality, and symbolic evidence” which stimulate sensory evocation in a way that could advance meaning-making in the selected text. These coordinates of aesthetic signification can be used to arrive at the artistic value of Kwame Dawes' *Duppy Conqueror* from the point of view of Neuroaesthetics. This is so especially because both tonality and symbolic evidence are structures that can provide the ground for enhancing signification and the unveiling of paradigms by which the textual environment in *Duppy Conqueror* can be construed.

As a rhetorical scheme that connects the tone of a literary work to its subject matter, tonality provides the canvass from which impulses that reveal pervasive violence, constant strenuous relationships and tensions that repudiate the positivist notion of universal humanity (among others) can be recovered in the text. The poem “House Arrest”, for instance, encodes conversational tone that reflects both the subject matter and mood of the poem. The tone that reveals some pervasive violence, strained relational encounters and sense of loss and the corresponding mood they generate in the poem can be explained through the canvass of words that run through the poem which reads:

North Africa, 1961  
dusty yellow light spills  
through the old window

throwing a black crucifix  
 where your body is flung,  
 stretched tense on the bed.  
 In half-light  
 a pyramid looms over the desert  
 And closer to home  
 the mosque shudders  
 with low murmur  
 of acolytes to Allah facing east.  
 You say amen.... (lines 7-13).

The lines encoding the tones that direct the mind to perceive the poem as conveying the author's attitude towards the subject matter are "a pyramid loom..." (line 8), "the mosque shudders" (line 10) and "with low murmur" (line 11). These sensory evocating linguistic items are heightened by the tonality that express the mood of 'fear', and 'discomfort'. That "a pyramid looms" (line 8) might not necessarily generate negative emotive impulse. But to say "the mosque shudders" (line 10) and that the persona speaks "with low murmur" (line 11) offer some signalling impulses strong enough to direct the reader's mind to think of some unfavourable social environment. This is because the word "shudder" stirs the reader's mind to think of some sinister occurrences as it entails a rapid or heavy vibration of some sort. And if the preceding action is to "...say amen" (line 13) "with low murmur" (line 11) then it will be "right" to think of the poem as conveying the sense of pervasive violence (as its theme or subject matter). This is to say, therefore, that the mind is an eye that sees through the canvass of words especially those carefully selected to inspire thinking in a predetermined manner. It goes to say, therefore, that the meaning the mind derives from literary works are conditioned by communicative impulses for which the brain is stimulated to conjure. These impulses are predetermined by the author's choice of words which, in the most part, create organic unity that tells how much the reader is able to enter into the author's emotional disposition or the textual environment they create in order to advance literary discourse.

Again, the poem is replete with some symbolic evidences capable of enabling the mind to see the foreboding events it encapsulates. The symbolic imageries generated by the lines: "dusty yellow light spills" (line 2), "throwing the black crucifix/where your body is flung" (lines 4-5), "in

half-light" (line 7), "a pyramid looms over the desert" (line 8), "the mosque shudders" (line 10), "downstairs in the bar, the skinny pianist/with scabs for knuckles" (line 14) and "and you play with the ash" (line 18), for example, aggregate some literary elements that capture the situation for which "the purpose of the author, the responses of the audience, the behaviour, thought, and feeling of characters, and the formal properties of literary works can be assessed and analysed" (Carroll, 2004:162) within the framework of Neuroaesthetics.

These symbolic evidences, in the most part, evince some sensory evocations such as hypersensitivity, discomfort, and despair all of which are able to reflect the mood and temperament of the textual environment. The ability of a writer to deploy such elements to enhance sensory perceptions is significant in that it can expand the reader's scope of anticipation called suspense in literary sense. Keeping the reader in such anticipatory mood sustains the reading process and becomes a tour de force in aesthetic sense. The line "dusty yellow light spills" (line 2), for instance, is metaphorical. It evokes the image of a burning fire which, in turn, draws the reader to share some form of imaginative sympathy with the persona – as, in the context of the poem, victim of colonialism. This form of intuition brings the reader closer to the text especially if they, in some ways, have similar memories or histories that form the meta-textual experiences which connect them to or bring them into the mind of the author. Through these meta-textual experiences the reader is able to predict both the mind of the author and those of the persona laying within the poem. And this is the merit of Michael's (2010:9) contribution to neuroaesthetic perspective on literary discourse; that "to prosper in any social environment we must be able to understand other minds and use this understanding to predict behaviour". The aesthetics of reading, in this sense, is, to Holland (1980:123), the ability of the reader to replicate himself in the experiences of the persona in a way that will make the textual world the replica of the reader's. This way, reading recreates the identity of the reader: it make the reader "discover their own fears and wishes that shape their psychic lives (Selen, 1985:122)



The line: “throwing the black crucifix/where your body is flung” (lines 4-5) further opens up the author's mind and enables them to relate with his motive namely, to integrate all elements that project the truth about colonial encounter for which the crucifix symbolises and to allow the reader to see how this heritage is manipulated in their bid to take over marginal spaces such as Africa. The juxtaposing of crucifix and a flung (presumably dead) body further inspires the mind to see this truth, of brutal colonial encounter, more succinctly. In the words of Carroll (2004:164), “truth of representation is in itself a motive, and in literature, the truth of representation is closely associated with an imaginative sympathy for the inner lives of other people”. What this means in the context of this study is that “the reader's sense of an author's motives enters directly into his or her feeling about the imaginative quality of literary work” (Carroll, 2004:164). This, to Neuroaesthetics, is how meaning holds in literature – “it trains us to see verbal and nonverbal cues to infer another person's thoughts and feeling” (Michael, 2010:9). The ability to enter into other people's feelings is what makes meaning-making a pleasurable exercise.

Fanon's (1964) *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays* will further aid the readers' perception of the conditions in North Africa which line 1 of the poem: “North Africa, 1961” triggers the readers' brain to think about. The book records the harrowing history of Algeria which, to Fanon (1964:31) is a “fragmented and bloody history that we must sketch on the level of cultural anthropology”. This form of history, he adds, records:

How inexplicably the country bristles! The roads no longer safe. The wheat fields transformed into sheets of flame. The Arabs becoming hostile.  
People talk. People talk.  
The women will be raped. Men will have their testicle cut  
off and rammed between their teeth  
(Fanon, 1964:47).

Referring to Fanon not only validates the subject matter of the poem but further facilitates understanding of the symbolic properties which the poem evokes in order to foreground its aesthetic impulse. If anything, it helps the reader to understand why a “body” is “flung” and why it

“stretched tense on the bed” (lines 5 & 6). All of these symbolic elements have reflected the mood and temperament of the text namely; fear and anguish.

After establishing the above symbolic evidence, returning again to the lines that read:

Downstairs, in the bar, the skinny pianist  
with scabs for knuckles  
coaxes “Bitter Fruit” from the out-of-tune grand  
tucked in the smoky corner  
and you play with the ash  
on the puddled counter,  
sipping gin while watching  
for the man with red eyes at your  
back...(lines 14-21).

further inspire the brain to see what Fanon (1964:31) calls the “fragmented and bloody history that we must sketch on the level of cultural anthropology”. The image of a “skinny pianist/with scabs for knuckles” (line 14-15) is a symbolic representation of the racist whites which, to Fanon (1964:31), reflects “the crudest element of a given structure”. More than anything else, the line depicting the white “with scab knuckle” open up the relational structure – of brutality – that objectifies the African/Oriental race(s) and justifies their treatment as ‘an-Other’. This “object man” as Fanon (1964:35) succinctly puts it, is “without means of existing, without a *raison d'être*, is broken in the very depth of his substance. The desire to live, to continue to, become more and more indecisive, more and more phantom-like”.

The poem “Requiem” goes further to trigger the reader's mind to understand why relational gaps create such tension captured in “House Arrest” and forms the thrust of other literary works written by authors within marginal spaces. The aesthetic worth of or value ascribed to such texts are to the extent that they stimulate the brain to find answers as to why humanity is sutured through relational disparity. Before turning to the idea of tonality and symbolic evidence as signifying structures by which the value of “Requiem” can also be unveiled and understood, it is important to offer some neurobiological explanations on ways through which bipolar humanity which runs through the poem can be understood.

Race, no doubt, is anchored on cultural differences. Culture, in itself, does not only “shape social organisation and practices” it also “reflects variation in the grouping structure of the neural and mental states” (Chiao, 2018:27). Suffice it to say, therefore, that culture which produces race generates emotions and even mental states specific to and different from same and other races. The Self-Other continuum that binary opposition tries to explain in Postcolonial and other marginal discourses can also be understood through markers of Neuroaesthetics.

Chiao (2018:29) defines racial identification as “the set of mental states with a sense of commitment and belonging to the group of one’s racial or ethnic heritage”. It is, to him, “associated with the magnitude of emphatic neural response within distinct brain region”. Chiao’s explanation is important to this study as it enables it to trace the source of racial grouping and the emotions it generates. It also opens up the emotions for which hierarchical structures – of Self and Other – privileged by this social mapping has not only defined but also split humanity as seen in the poem. Explicating on hierarchical preference as structure of racial identification, Cheon et al (2011:642) aver that “hierarchical cultures maintain expectations that dominant group members receive preferential access to resources, while subordinate group members expect pastoral care from dominant group members”.

The tonality in “Requiem” captures and validates the notions of racial identification offered by Cheon et al (2011:642) above. The lines that read:

I sing requiem  
for the dead, caught in that  
mercantilistic madness  
We have not built lasting  
monuments of stone

facing the sea, the watery tomb (lines 1-5), encode the tonality for which racial mappings and the tensions they engender can be apprehended as aesthetic element in literary discourse. In consequence, lines 1-3: “I sing requiem/for the dead, caught in that/mercantilistic madness” capture the structure of the author’s mind and situates him within the larger frame of racial typecasting, in this sense, as an-Other – a victim of the governing Self. The tone running through the

poem validates the victim-stasis of the persona. Hence, to “Sing requiem/for the dead” (line 1) is to communicate a deep sense of disappointment and helplessness. What it does, therefore, is that it expresses sadness particularly as the persona appears to be helpless. The symbolic evidences of these lines are, clearly, those of subjugation and annihilation. The persona and, by extension, the author, expresses both sadness and empathy with the cultural group they belong.

Dawes, as a hyphenated personality who can be categorised into the helming bio-spaces as an African, Caribbean, African-American as well as Caribbean Diaspora through immediate and remote encounters with these spaces understands the convolution of racial typecasting and has made it a subject of literary concern. This is why Chiao (2018:29) reveals that “for African Americans who show strong racial identification, empathy for group members is associated with greater neural activation...” He therefore, expresses the empathy for pain in a manner that shows his [un]conscious attachment with the culture he identifies with – that which has been nudged to the margin in cultural context.

The total effect of the lines that read “...caught in that/mercantilistic madness” (line3) can be perceived in the way it provides the tone that captures the persona’s displeasure and anger with the dominant group within the racial hierarchical mapping. The feeling of displeasure and, of course anger, generated by these lines are seen in the way the mental state of the reader is triggered to perceive the effect of racial disparity on the persona. The symbolic evidence of this shared mood is in the way the persona communicates the pattern of inhumanity displayed by the dominant group in their efforts to “receive preferential access to resources” (Chiao, 2018:29). In overall, the aesthetic value these lines enunciate is in the way they create psychological coherence about racial identification as captured by Cheon et al (2011:642).

Taken together, the aesthetic effect in “Requiem” is realised in the way it triggers the reader’s mind to understand how social construction or racial mappings provides the platform by which humanity is constantly kept in relational tension. This tension is sustained by cultural artefacts

particularly historical evidence and literary texts encoding some symbolic structures that shape the memories of people about cultural heritages. For Dawes, this poem serves as:

shrines of remembrance  
where faithful descendants  
may stand and watch the smoke  
curl into the sky  
in memory of those  
devoured by the cold Atlantic (lines 8-13).

To enable the memory to return these images – of subjugation, of annihilation and of brutish encounter – the poet, like Fanon, calls for and encourages people of his descent to find the encrustation of these experiences “In every blues I hear” (line 14). This, to him, and as this study has advanced, is the source for which literary aesthetics can be shaped and realised. It is even so because sustaining such elements of value in literary text as platforms for literary enunciation will constantly remind the people to remain conscious of the racial politics for which their existence is perpetually [re]shaped. The reading process, in consequence, is the process of interpreting experiences in a manner that will enable the reader not only to come to terms but also to cope with the world.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has shown ways in which the reading process enables readers to construct situational models by following the unfolding plot, experiencing the persona's actions and desires. It therefore, demonstrates that by following this model, each reader finds in the literary work the kind of thing they characteristically wish or fear the most, and uses the text to symbolize and replicate their own identity and psychic economy. This, to Neuroaesthetics, is how meaning holds in literature – it trains us to see verbal and nonverbal cues to infer another person's thoughts and feeling (Michael, 2010:9). Literary reading, in this sense, facilitates the reader's insight into the meaning of their own feelings, reifying their values and re-establishing their culture through the text's resonance with their private experience. On the whole, the ability of the reader to enter the feelings and perspectives of others is what makes the reading the meaning-making process a pleasurable exercise.

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