MADNESS WITH METHODS

Owojecho Omoha

1University of Abuja.

September 06, 2023

Abstract

Notable critics, including Sunday Anozie and Robert Morsberger, have branded Christopher Okigbo’s Labyrinths as allusions to the Nigerian crisis of 1965, and the civil war that followed in 1966, as well as Ibo traditional religion, the historical and personal idiosyncrasies, and as a literary work from Theocritus and Vergil to Howl. This article veers from such imputations into a hitherto untrodden ground. It subjects behaviours of the persona in Labyrinths – from “Heavensgate” to “Limits” and “Silences”, and from “Distances” to “Path of Thunder” to clinical and qualitative inquiries and concludes: the poetics are not only symptomatic of mania, the obscurities are couched in methods

Introduction

Labyrinths derives its name and meanings from the ancient Greek word “labyrinthos” – a massive, complex and deliberately designed structural passage meant to slow down any potential enemy, Minotaur, the monster in particular, from killing King Minos of Crete at Knossos in 400 BC. A close-ancient-Greek-contextualization tinkered with a broad-oracular-interpretation accommodates Okigbo’s Labyrinths as a confused mental journey of the split mind. The journey begins with initiations to bargain easy access to focal points, but disastrously ends, at the very points of beginnings, with obscurity. Poetic obscurity, the opening epigraph of this essay ultimately suggests, begins with the persona and ends with the persona. It owes nothing to the personality of the writer. To further disambiguate the term from personality of the poet, poetics technically employed here explores theories in poetry. Poetics of obscurity, in this sense, highlights possible difficulties arising from psychodynamic indices in interpreting actions of the persona, and by extension identifying and classifying behaviours of the persona in Labyrinths using poetry and psychology theories in the work of art.

Evaluating behavioural problems gives vent to Cecilia Warren’s epigraph used to foreground the eclectic approaches to obscurity as madness in this experimental essay.

Christopher Okigbo is one of “…the finest Nigerian poet of his generation”… and “one of the most remarkable anywhere in our time”.2 (Achebe, 2012, p.114). The “generation” is the first generation of Nigerian writers. It includes Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Samson Amali, and Dennis Osadebe. Choosing Okigbo’s only surviving posthumous collection Labyrinths (1971) for qualitative inquiry is informed by the text’s morbid “pursuit of the white elephant” project or “what turned to be an illusion” and the fascinating transitions at different points, from the persona to “I Okigbo, town- crier”.3 (Okigbo, 1971, p. 67).

Interestingly, poets are like the gods. They create personae that are largely invisible, morbid, and oftentimes merely perceived, not heard, from one page of a text to another. Invisibility suggests that personae are not in the image of their creators. They are not even in the likeness of their creators – i.e. the personae are created in form of humans, act as humans, but unlike humans are forever invisible. Invisibility denies them real human status. This infamous contradiction of being the determiner and yet fail to outline the personae equally denies god-figure of poets. A persona is a potential Pandora box designed to “transfuse emotion –not transmit thought but set up in the reader’s sense a vibration corresponding to what was felt by the writer”.4 (Housman, 1961, p. 172). Whatever persona Okigbo created at the pre-writing and writing phases
of Labyrinths, including our consciousness that the creator outlives the creator, the vague declaration, “I Okigbo, town-crier” is infallibly amorphous. “I Okigbo” shares common identity with the “imperishable” persona who further declares, “When you have finished/ & done up my stitches, / Wake me near the altar, / & this poem will be finished…” (Okigbo, 1971, p. 27). Finishing and doing up stitches of the imperishable are endless celebrations of morbid poetry that Labyrinths suggests. Whatever that is spoken or written by the individual at the worst moments of schizophrenia is morbid. Morbid poetry is, therefore, the “poetry written while the individual with schizophrenia is experiencing the worst of the disease”.6 (Bakare, 2009, p. 218). Okigbo’s persona is drowned in this regard.

Labyrinths draws closer to poetry of insight as the morbidity turns celebrative and the persona’s utterances go high from the circle of individual knowledge to the circle of public domain. The urgency to rediscover “we” personae in Labyrinths makes clinical exploration desirable, and the ways of going about the discovery imperative, if “insight poetry” is taken to mean “schizophrenic poetic expression while individuals are lucid and in remission”.7 (Bakare, 2009, p. 218). Bakare strongly insinuates that poetic expressions are symptomatic of schizophrenia and that the “mental well-being” of a persona is clinically verifiable based on empirical methods.

### Madness with Methods

Inquiries into madness as a phenomenon remain infallibly obscure and elusive as the biological approach to evolution of schizophrenia propounded in 1964 by Julian Huxley, Ernst May, Humphrey Osmond and Abraham Hoffer. Initially regarded as a hypothetical study put together by “a galaxy of genius”.8 (Hurst, 1972, p. 239), the evolutionary theory of schizophrenia turned out to be wide approaches by the four principal investigators. The four were later abandoned by their followers following what was described as inconsistencies in methods due to varying backgrounds in research interests. Qualitative inquiry approach to madness avoids the pitfalls of the “odd foursome”,9 (De Bont, 2010, p. 144) who had no sound reputation in psychology. When madness takes a hold on someone, metaphorically speaking and to push the debate further psychologically, “in the first case, we are silenced by the impossibility of saying anything more and in the second place we are silenced by the impossibility of ever saying anything”.10 (Oliver, 1995, p. 6). In other words, silence regretfully defines madness.

When Geertrude van Lennich broke silence as she openly disrupted a Church service by bishop Ghysbert Masius in 1605 shouting, “Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is still being crucified every day”,11 (qtd. in Sandra Uray-Kennett, 2011, p. 124), spectators were muzzled by “the impossibility of saying anything.” If we remove the identifier “Geertrude van Lennich” from the mad narrative, the line intensifies the monstrosity of a metaphor spoken by a façade with a lot of sense. I rely on façade as a method in this section of the essay. Going by the agonies suffered in Christian faith and the avalanche of emotional tortures in pieties, there is sense in “Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is still being crucified every day.” This too is an approach the way “There is always some madness in love, / But there is also always some reason in madness” is a psychological approach to madness.12 (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 28).

Contrary to perceived popular sayings that madness is characterized by senselessness therefore, I argue that irrationality in madness is sensible and methodical. Qualitative inquiry research method, after all, is the unusual and extraordinary manner of a mind-set struggling in pains to make sense of a complex circumstance, or perhaps, choosing qualitative method as a roadmap and not the other, the mind tends to say in “The Road Not Taken” that “I took the one less travelled by, /And that has made all the difference” 13 to get to the normal (Frost, 1916, p. 1). This is not to say that obscurity in poetry is arbitrarily spoken by the persona, even as he hardly recognizes the complexity in the spoken words. I was not, as a researcher in poetic madness, for instance, aware of detailed complexities in Labyrinths, when I designed this article, until the absurdities systematically emerged in the lines. I realized that applying qualitative research method to this article was empirically achievable. “Recognizing and responding to complexity and fundamental uncertainty offers opportunity to innovate research methodologies and methods capable of evolving as we learn more about the problem”14 (Gear et al. 2022, p. 1). Innovation undeniably ties madness to senselessness, at least in extraordinary way of thinking, where a supposedly wrong decision magnificently turns out to be a major
breakthrough. Innovation, in this way, is characterized by sense and non-sense.

Madness as method or what seems like sense and non-sense in poetics occurs when “. . . either the operation of Distinction in quality or that of Conjunction in quantity could not be accurately and completely effected”.15 (Hickok, 2009, p. 161). Whereas “distinction in quality” queries listener or reader’s inability to correctly decipher textual meanings, and so is inclined to sense and value, “conjunction in quantity” aggregates text volume and confusedly adds to the indistinct quality of the text, and so is inclined to non-sense. “Through such processes of controlled perceptual exploration we collect information that takes us from vague, pre-attentive appreciation that something is out there, to a detailed understanding of just what it is”.16 (Thomas, 1999, p. 218). In the epigraph that sets off this article, Cecilia Warren’s perceptual instinct or cognitive humanities approach precisely identifies obfuscations arising from incoherent linguistic frames and semantic appropriations tending toward Nietzsche’s ethos of “the inner beast” and the psychology of madness.

Madness with methods insists that metaphorical understanding of “the beast within” lures the minds of the persona and that of the reader with empathy. The minds simultaneously move, adjust, and fret from sense to non-sense. The perceptual allure inflames the imagination of every reader with poetics of “heavenly fire” – a metaphor which ultimately translates to delusion in cognitive humanities and unmistakably shifts poetics to psychology. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines the term “cognition” as “all conscious and unconscious processes by which knowledge is accumulated, such as perceiving, recognizing, conceiving, and reasoning” To acquire understanding by way of thinking, what ought to be, and what ought not to be, resides in psychological science domain. To attain a know-how by seeing requires the presence of an object, imaginary or concrete and for the photo-sight of the object to be stored in the mind and marked “experience” is psychologically phenomenal. To sense, whatever it is, be it to observe, or to feel, or to touch, or to hear is all the more psychological.

Qualitative inquiry favours cognitive poetics smouldered in sense and nonsense when cognition meets poetics. When cognition hobnobs narrative, the structure and the behaviour of characters give way to cognitive narratology. The trajectory, in drama, dramaturgy and the behaviour of characters, tilts to drama and cognition, while in the theatre, absurdities and performance of actors, side-step the sub-type of performance and cognition. Either way, the effusion from cognitive psychology to humanities ends in cognitive humanities. What comes to mind, in poetics, and of course, in all genres of literature when insanity is the subject and cognition is the teacher, the summation often ends in the “art is mad.” Consequently, I further argue that applying qualitative inquiry methods to the study of the persona, his mind, and his poetics is clinical in nature, and that the approach is fantastic enough in diagnosing symptoms of schizophrenia in poetics. Schizophrenia etymologically Grecian. The base word “phren” means “mind” and the affix “schizo” means “split” {schizo+phrenic = split mind }. In other words, the persona’s mental processes of moving, adjusting, and fretting, from “vague, pre-appreciation” ultimately ends at schizophrenia in Labyrinths. Diagnosing schizophrenia in poetry, if nothing else, arises from the feelings of “technical excellence”17 embodied in depersonalization of the persona (Eliot, 1962, p. 474).

Eliot’s depersonalization model argues that poetry, no matter how close to human emotions, does not represent the poet. I further contend that the axiom validates presumptions of systemic madness in poetry as it mistakenly concedes the primacy of “technical excellence” to the immediacy of “his art is mad” in cognitive humanities. To mysteriously transform from the persona to the poet strangely recalls I.A. Richard’s “Magical View” in which the persona exists “. . . but outside real life. . . individuality has completely disappeared. . . the world appears like a phantom, a gigantic hallucination”.18 (Dugas et al, 1996, p. 455). Blending depersonalization using “the beast within”, or “one out of his mind” musters the whole lots of poetic excellence and dissatisfaction with the beast. The mixture creates a common ground, that is, the “. . . ideas tend to spread continuously and to affect certain others which stand to them in a particular relation of affectability”.19 (Pierce, 2007, p. 22). Given that the persona inwardly transforms to a beast, yet in the physique of a man, the process could only be imagined. Incredulity involved in the seccreties is measured by “mad” transformation and its trajectory approaches what the reader dubs “technical excellence” on accessing the twin
encounter. Interestingly, the argument in this section is that “technical experience” in poetry with all its esoteric flavour and “magical view” spreads from the idea of depersonalization in schizophrenia. A persona may become cryptic and obsessive in folk-lore, mythology, occultism and childhood experience to create poetic excellence, but the combinations, of course, stimulate obscurity and perhaps a more puzzling experience as in schizophrenia. One assumption is that “schizophrenic behaviour is controlled by stimuli in the immediate environment. In the case of schizophrenia, this means that any individual word may be a response to some immediately preceding word rather than the semantic intention of the utterance as a whole”.20 (Salzinger et al, 1970, p. 258-76). A word that is a response to the other is perceptually imposed regardless of the meaning, in poetic discourse. The imposition, oftentimes, leads to the formation of a new word typical of schizophrenic behaviour. “Cases of neologism, live metaphor, or ungrammatical sentences, as well as archaisms, paradox, and oxymoron (the traditional tropes) are clear examples of deviation” in poetic discourse.21 (van Peer and Hakemulder, 2007, p. 547). The deviation may be caused by a feat of narcissistic rage. Between “ideologues and geniuses”.22 (Soyinka, 2001, p. 264), schizophrenics hobnob with metaphors, absurdities and ungrammaticalities, and being between two worlds fail to clearly declare: “We speak only for the sick like us” to tacitly combine poetry and madness in unprecedented fashion.

Given that these exploratory clinical approaches potentially disentangle mad narratives (Freud23, 1893/1895, p. 46; Nietzsche24, 2006, p. 28; Laing25, 1959, p. 65; Foucault26, 1961, p. 65), critical inquiry mythology is poised to exhume the remains of “illness is not a metaphor” controversy opened five decades ago.27 (Sontag, 1977, p. 3). Assuming without conceding that “illness is not a metaphor,” how do we explain poetics where each word predicts a new word, each line prompts multiplicity of meanings, each section is fragmented, and a whole poem or a book of poems is engulfed in obscurity mediated by symptoms of schizophrenia? The ennui, and of course, my gross dissatisfaction with Sontag supposition find no answers, at least not without exploring a text, using qualitative inquiry.

**Labyrinths: Madness with Methods**

In dedicating Degeneration28 to Caesar Lombroso, Max Nordau specifically warned on the limitations of literary and aesthetic critic. His concern was “…the subjective impressions received from the works he criticizes,” and that the critic was incapable of judging as to whether the speech is a product “…of a shattered brain and also the nature of the mental disturbance expressing itself by them”.29 (1895, viii). Nordau’s apostasy against imagination did not foresee the birth of interdisciplinary studies in the midst 1920s, let alone that the critic in cognitive humanities would stand with the surgical blade in one hand and the imaginative knife in the other, to dissect the mind of even the degenerate persona and flaunts the results publicly. Whatever renders the mind of a persona split does not only come from within, it enters from without using several channels.

The channels open from the vantage of Labyrinths as a text, if the argument that “…literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes,” is anything to go by.30 (Barthes, 1967, p. ). Okigbo, in this sense, summarily disappears, forthwith. Whatever incoherence, obscurity in speech, fright, anxiety, delusion, hallucination, silence, depersonalization and isolation that occur in Labyrinths are sheer perversions of the mind of a persona – the author had entered “his own death” much earlier. In what follows, I explore “…the distinct realms of knowledge into significant relation; to argue their analogous, contiguous, or causal interconnection; and to use one such realm in order to disclose or contextualize some unexpected feature of another”.31 (McKeon, 1994, p. 18). I contextualize each distinct schizophrenic symptom seeking to model itself as artistic pattern to give impressions of obscure poetry: the result is the “unexpected” close affinities in their convoluted forms between madness and poetry.

Labyrinths is borne out of “Homecoming” of a persona claiming to have arrived, and the loneliness that accompanies the supposed blissful moments: “…nothing here is ashamed of obscure, obstinate feelings”.32 (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 146). The paradox of obstinacy in this context is analogous to “anything goes” rule in a professional tact-match. Everything is possible at homecoming including the thought of starting a tortuous
and rancorous journey from hell to heaven in a weird and deadly style. The choice to start the journey itself is based on mood swing which ultimately leads to regrets, though it may look calm at the beginning. So, when the mood swung from bizarre islands in hell to heavens in *Labyrinths*, surprisingly, the persona transfigured to a “Newcomer” (17) awaiting “Initiations” (6) and a grand reception by the “Watermaid” (10) at “The Passage” (6) of the supposed heavens—the several chambers are assumed (2). The constellations “…later grew into a ceremony of innocence, something like a mass, an offering to Idoto, the village stream of which I drank, in which I washed, as a child; the celebrant, a personage like Orpheus, is about to begin a journey” (37) (xi). Do not ask where madness is in these poetics, or perhaps, the evolutionary methods. Madness is here; but in form of symptoms—the idea of homecoming, immersion of innocence, celebrity of a kind, and the incongruity of a celebrity like Orpheus in Greek mythology. Paul Maurice Legrain argues that “Mystical thoughts are to be laid to the account of the insanity of the degenerate” (1886, p. 45). That is to say, the allusion to Orpheus in *Labyrinths* is a mysterious transference of obscure mental image conjured by the persona to create the mythological account of “Idoto” and to premise the ego-maniac force in “of which I drank, in which I washed”. For recounting the weird experience of a journey yet to start, and for already experiencing remission from delusional grandeur associated with loneliness, the persona, for sure, is mad, if loneliness, egomania, and mythical thoughts are subjected to qualitative inquiry.

The physiology of “morbidity associated with loneliness appears to be mediated by psychological changes” and a sense of failure. Psychologically speaking, “one with a load of destiny on his head” (xiv) is incredibly an obscure persona and an impenetrable personality. Obscurity and impenetrability are obvious in “after we had formed/ then only the forms were formed/ and all the forms/ were formed after our forming…” (57) Misunderstanding is compounded by the strange “we” pronoun that splits the persona into personae or multiple personalities. “It is at least possible to suppose that the individual whose abiding mode of being-in-the-world is of this split nature is living in what to him, if not to us, is a world that threatens his being from all sides, and from which there is no exit” (Laing, 1990, p. 79). The entrapped is not only stripped of dignity and identity, the meaninglessness of the trap makes the persona suddenly become “talkative like the weaverbird”, and in “Between sleep and waking” abruptly brandishes “A tiger mask and nude spear…” (23). Insomnia all the more exacerbates restlessness in *Labyrinths*.

The psychomotor-related problem “becoming talkative”, that is either from the experience of sleepiness or the lack of it, leaves the polygonal reader perplexed. Obvious question expectedly arising from the uncertainty, even from the persona, in the crisis moment is: “Was it a vision, or a waking dream” (Keats, 1960, p. 356). David F. Dinges and seven other researchers revealed that “The most consistent effect on subjective sleepiness and mood was a reliable change across days of sleep restriction”. (Dinges et al, 1997, p. 270). The physical “change” of talking too much due to lack of sleep is evident in “If I don’t learn to shut my mouth I’ll soon go to hell. I Okigbo, town-crier, together with my iron bell”. (Keats, 1960, p. 67). Either way, being asleep or at the same time awake is metaphorically obscure and psychologically depriving—hence its relation to emotional crisis and insanity. The sudden swap of identity to “I Okigbo” is worrisome, though to an alarmist it is a ploy, perhaps, the most obscure manoeuver resulting to depersonalization in poetics’ history. “It is in this depersonalisation that art may be said to approach the condition of science”. (Eliot, 1962, p. 470). Eliot alludes that the persona in *Labyrinths* has one foot in poetry and the other in psychological sciences.

The awake or dream experience in *Labyrinths*, from psychological sciences perspective, inflames mythical jokes and their relations to lifelessness the Idoma man humorously describes as “imputation of unreality”. One example of mythic jokes in Idoma relating to unconscious frequently used is: “Ebiode choko …” Only the initiate doubly initiated like the initiations in *Labyrinths* (6-9) not a “Newcomer” (17-19) understands the hilarious imputations of the catchy phrase which fully translated is: “Ebiode choko Ode kikpo kano kweba”–while on the neck of someone to cross a menacing river, the frightened Ode in self-transcendence screams: “my feet touch a big fish.” Pleasure of the Ode joke lies in the impossibility of being on someone’s neck, far away and above the water; yet claiming the feet, not that of the carrier, touch a fish, and a big one for that matter, down the river. The joke arouses interest of the hearer, who mentally battles the impossibility and comes to a resolution that Ode’s behaviour depicts lunacy or “idiocy masquerading as a joke” (Freud, 1960, p. 190). The aura of incredulity in this myth coupled with multiplicity of personalities
encountered in “after we had formed,” make it more compelling for the reader not to accept “I Okigbo” in *Labyrinths* to be real, and in any way practically possible. “I Okigbo” is a charade and “…the white lies it sounds like” particularly makes the shriek a case of depersonalization bordering on masquerading identity to accentuate and methodically display poetic obscurities in *Labyrinths* (Browning, 1996, p. 645). “What if” arguments, arise from “…If I don’t learn to shut my mouth I’ll soon go to hell” (67) and the utterance is tenable as symptomatically paranoiac –a false sense that someone is targeting the persona with the aim of eliminating him? What if, in the real sense, no one is targeting the persona, where does he go to, blissful heaven? What if the bliss renders him grandiose? And what if, as the persona claims he is Okigbo, and someone is unfortunate enough to believe that he is, how do we account for delusion of inclusion in the poetics: “Okigbo accompanies us the oracle enkindles us” and in “Okigbo accompanies us the rattles enlighten us”. These “what if” arguments somehow make qualitative inquiry into madness in *Labyrinths* methodical and highly experimental.

Experimentations in these suppositions range from confusions in meanings and meaningful confusions to misunderstandings between poetics and the science of perception. Less confusion is in the binary: “Okigbo accompanies us”, but while delusion of inclusion clearly identifies the speaker other than Okigbo, confusions in “…the oracle enkindles us” and “…the rattles enlighten us” are unprecedentedly incomprehensible. Oracular and commotions created by the poetics bifurcate into further misunderstandings of what is imagination on one hand, and what is perception on the other, albeit the duo are regarded as extraordinary show of semantic oddities in *Labyrinths*.

“Disordered thinking and delusions sometimes—but not always—co-occur in acute phases of schizophrenia and often in bipolar acute mania”. (Elvev˚ag, et al. 2011, p. 461). The disturbing aspects in “oracle” and in “rattles” are the inability to predict imminent dangers involved in the harrowing visual picture “of Guernica, /On whose canvas of blood, /The slits of his tongue cling to glue”. (35). The visual pictures render the persona mesmerized, and in “reversed dream”—hence the implosion and wailings “for the fields of men: For the barren wedded ones; /For perishing children….” (50) Instigated by realities of the 1937 Spanish War—the broken limbs, headless bodies, fallen walls, severed faces, hands, and feet in Pablo Picasso’s “Guernica” orchestra what has not happened in Nigeria, but yet imagined to have happened in the mode of source memory in *Labyrinths*. Source memory inevitably intermingles poetics to degenerate into symptoms often “…associated with hallucinations among patients with schizophrenia, as well as healthy individuals scoring high on a scale measuring predisposition to hallucinations” (Bre´ bion, et al. 2008, p. 383). As someone predisposed to hallucinations, the persona ostensibly cast off “the burden of several centuries” only to encounter admixture of visions typical of the mentally ill. The poesy of the very encounter—i.e., the metaphor indicating break of thunder or war and the unexpected “Hurray for thunder” echo loss of bodily sensations. A good clinical psychologist will diagnose the sensual experience with the result: “The process is that of sensual anaesthesia, of total liberation from all physical and emotional tension; the end result, a state of aesthetic grace”. (xii). Sensory anaesthesia and the so-called aesthetic beauty are two obscure combinations that run on our minds. The persona’s regrets at leaning “upon a withered branch/ A blind beggar leaning on a porch” (64), or “O wind, swell my sails; and may my banner run the course of wider waters”, (65) or the secrets threatening with iron mask/ The last lighted torch of the century— leading to thunder outbreak are poetics hard to disambiguate, at least not without a qualitative inquiry into the behavioural patterns of the obtuse maker. An easy resolution of the obtuseness comes in “sensual anaesthesia” and the contras: frenzy, or perilous, or stuporous indications of schizophrenia without loss of consciousness of “aesthetic grace”.

Visual grace in “Imagination is a mental faculty, which develops conceptions by the synthesis of perceptions”. (Giebeler-Angelika, 1983, p.16). The scenario weighs near “Logistics/ Which is what poetry is” in *Labyrinths* (9). Distortions of sensory response from the visual scenes make transitory encounters momentary: “So brief her presence –/match-flare in wind’s breath –/so brief with mirrors around” (11). The transitory encounter leaves the persona emotionally bruised, confused and confounded: “and I, where am I? /fulfilling each moment in a /broken monody—a tinge that is half poetics and half mania (13). Qualitative inquiry methods, nonetheless, would reveal, and the revelation leaves no options in poetic discourse,
that “Illness was no doubt the final cause of the whole urge to create”68 in the brief encounter between the persona and the Watermaid (Heine, 2004, p. 2). The dictum: “When you have finished /& done up my stitches, /Wake me near the altar, / & this poem will be finished…” practically endorses the fret, the freak and the fright associated with pathological conjectures. If nothing else, the aura of dissections recalls anxieties and somatic manifestations such as palpitations. How the internal and physical manifestations of madness blend with poesy to create obscurities in Labyrinths does not really matter, at least not to the persona, so long the combinations bring forth perfect union: “And who says it matters/ Which way the kite flows, /Provided the movement is/ Around the burning market”69 (30). The obscure approaches nevertheless matter to the qualitative inquirer – hence the subject of this article.

The metaphysics of mentally panel-beating or descending “upon the twin gods of Irkalla puts African cosmo-logy in the front burner.”70 (33). The metaphysics matters when negotiating between behavioural breakdown and normative order in the persona. The twin gods of the forest – the tortoise and the python in Ibo traditions spiritually subdue the Mesopotamian deities amidst silences: “the gods lie unsung, /Veiled only with mould, /Behind the shrinehouse” in stuporous state of silences.71 (34). Poetics, even so, thrive in silences: “Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter”.72 (Keats, 1960, p. 320). It is for the reason “Silences” in Labyrinths “explore the possibilities of poetic metaphor in an attempt to elicit the music to which all imperishable cries must aspire”.73 (xii). The cry, “How many times can a man turn his head /And pretend he just doesn’t see?” is not only imperishable, it intensifies the search for madness in silence (Dylan, 1963). That is to say, no matter how golden silence may look, the one pretending not to see what goes on is emotionally disorganized by “the sounds and silence in madness” of he who turns his eyes away from realities.75 (Longy, 1984, p. 407). Silence predates Labyrinths; though the archaeology of silence in poetry started in 18th century when literary critics began to admire “…all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made”76 (Foucault, 1961, p. x). Madness, in this sense, is silence and silence is madness with neither “why” questions nor probing “how” methods in the incoherent, incongruent and jumbled poetica syntax.

The “imperishable cries” of “the Silent Sisters” in Labyrinths draw on Gerald Hopkins’ The Wreck of the Deutschland; yet they are “…entirely metaphoric; the ship is the Nigerian society of the early 1960s which foundered in a political storm”.77 (Egudu, 2003, p. 28). This view on silence in which nuns in Labyrinths are sole victims with no “escape ladder” or “an anchorage” in a drowning boat heightens silence to a state of catatonic schizophrenia. “So, one dips one’s tongue in ocean, and begins /To cry to the mushroom of the sky” in the unfortunate disaster.78 (41). If ocean metaphor “is the sigh of our spirits” and we are silently confused on how “We shall make a grey turn to face it,” what makes madness different from silence in Labyrinths –the puzzle, the probe, or the methods (42)?

Evanesence as the “match flare” appearance in Labyrinths, says one critique, is implanted from Ezra Pound’s “Cantos 6 and 104, and where the ‘downward’ movement here really was ‘upward,’ and the wind that of the King.”80 (Clark, 1978, p. 25). Swapping of personae rarely occurs in poetry, that is, the persona in Labyrinths may be likened to that of Pound’s, the two can never be the same, except at the level of spiritual influence where one puzzle mutates the other according to diagnostic criteria. Sunday O. Anozie describes this kind of illusionary cross-referencing approach to poetica as “the result of successive impacts on a highly sensitive mind”.81 (158). Investigating spiritual influence of personae is not within the purview of this article; it seems, however, what Anozie is saying is that an imaginative mind influenced by obscurities is susceptible to behavioural patterns of the persona in Labyrinths.

In what follows, I demonstrate imaginative influence of Greek mythology on Ibo traditions based on source memory and the death of Palinurus: “It is over, Palinurus, at least for you. /In yours tarmac of night and fever-dew”.82 (47). Except for the night that has “tarmac” suggesting a movement and the imprecise “fever-dew” suggesting danger in poetica, the utterance of the persona is more of word-salad from a typical schizophrenic. In Virgil’s Aeneid, Palinurus who pilots Aeneas fleeing at night to a new homeland in Italy following the Trojans war in Troy is trounced by the god of sleep, falls into the sea and drowned. Clear connections are not there between Ibo traditions and this Greek epic; but the persona who undergoes emotional tortures
draws on the far-fetched-allusion to emphasize influence of Greek mythology on his psyche, though he turns to chart an independent course for Ibo traditions. This explains the mental destruction of the twin gods Irkalla and the adaption of the tortoise and the python by the persona in *Labyrinths*.

Ibo traditional thought, again, sparks in the salient silent incantation tunes in drum modes. The drum is used to invoke “ogbanje” spirits to move, even if they “are very far away,” to come. In *Labyrinths*, the drums speak in broken and disjointed tunes reminiscence of invocation: “We are tuned for a feast-of-seven-souls.”

Incantations, after all, are seemingly senseless sounds used either to invoke spirits or cure illness in magical traditions. The persona, in this context, uses incantatory sounds of hollow drums, tanks and thunder, and magically turns the sounds to “swifter messengers” to re-engage the weary gonads and move them from the forest to intervene in the threatening air. While this obscure nostalgic infatuation reminiscences “ogbanje” tradition, the persona, again, draws on “Ishthar’s lament for Tammuz” to further complicate the already chaotic situation.

Reinforcing complications, at this point, is shrouded in the wailing “For the barren wedded ones; /For perishing children...” and indeed, “...for the fields of men.” There is none, so far, in studies in qualitative inquiry, including the present amorphous persona in *Labyrinths*, who in such a desperate state of confusion or contrition, anxieties or hallucinations, paranoia or egomania, in pathological and psychological worlds, that will not in all honesty mumble sounds/incantations in high risk condition. Incantation, in other words, minimally navigates methodical erudition to concatenate poetic obscurities and madness in this essay.

No one else understands concatenation better than the persona who in solitude paddles “...through some dark/labyrinth, from laughter to the dream.” The persona, from the poetics of “dark labyrinth,” moves from ambush to anguish and surreptitiously lands in fleeting catatonia: “the only way to go/through the archway/to the catatonic pingpong/of the evanescent halo...”.

Apparently, this momentary excitement after a bout of catatonic schizophrenia tells how “each sigh is the stillness of the kiss...” in obscurity. Evanseness of the episode makes the poetics more of verbal violence that leaves no traces of intelligibility at the end. Intelligibility, even where it echoes onomatopoeically, is further impaired as the utterance drags the hearer to partake in the estranged communion: “Come into my carven/Shake the mildew from your hair; / Let your ear listen; / My mouth calls from a carven...” An invitation into privacy intrinsically lures configuration of conflicting meanings in verbal rage. Take, for instance, the hapless figurative expression: “O mother mother Earth, unbind me; let this be my last testament”.

If Earth unbinds the persona, the verbal rage crudely foresees his death. It is from the foresight that a twist on rebirth quickly pops in the elegiac rage that “foreshadows its going /Before a going and coming that goes on forever.” Rage and tears suggest continuities in poetics and obsessions foregrounded in rebirth conundrum that brings forth a new persona. Rage in dying and the pains of rebirth in *Labyrinths*, therefore, are vistas on new directions in poetics of obscurity tacitly tampered with mental illness.

One hypothesis is that, and the hypothesis looks credible, “The obvious illustration of foregrounding comes from the semantic opposition of literal and figurative meaning: a literary metaphor is a semantic oddity which demands that a linguistic form should be given something other than its normal (literal) interpretation.” The fury in “Going and coming that goes on forever” with which *Labyrinths* draws to a close, again, recalls excitement and tears associated with “ogbanje” child in Ibo culture. Notwithstanding this literal traditional interpretation, the poetics of rebirth in the rage stands in strong opposition —i.e., as the persona departs, the text is not endless for sure, the departure predicts the coming of “a new star” or a new persona perhaps as incomprehensible as the “OLD STAR” (72). Poetics of obscurity, in this sense, is hypothetically imbued with lunacy of varying types in varying circumstances, now and in time to come.

Conclusion
Incomprehensibilities dubbed poetics in Christopher Okigbo’s *Labyrinths* –from “Heavensgate” to “Limits” and “Silences”, and from “Distances” to “Path of Thunder” are, in summation, symptomatic of mania. Even when the poetry bifurcated and from bifurcation moved to befuddlements and to a point of depersonalization, and the persona in a hallucinatory mode identified himself as “I, Okigbo, town-crier” and the persona strangely beckoned, “Okigbo accompanies us” shortly after, our captivating attention turned nowhere, saw nowhere, and focused nowhere, but on blending poetry and schizophrenia. Sunday Anozie, John Pepper Clark, Kathleen Brunner, Robert E. Morsberger and other critics have branded *Labyrinths* as “. . . obscure allusions to Nigerian life and ritual as well as literary works from Theocritus and Vergil to Howl” (Morsberger, 1973, 603) and went ahead to characterize *Labyrinths* as “The Apocalypse of Representation” oscillating from Ibo traditional religion to the historical and the personal (Brunner, 2001, p. 80). While such poetics can nonetheless be validated, the critics took for granted the obtuseness or some forms of lunacies discernable in the incoherent and fragmented language, and chunks and lumps of allusive wreckages therein contained. I reject the imputations of these critics in favour of a hitherto untrodden ground –that is, like Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) whose mad dreams vanished and hatred filled his heart, *Labyrinths* ‘persona masquerades as a sane visionary poet, but his butt displays lunacies at many instances when subjected to critical inquiry.

**NOTES**

5. (Okigbo, 1971, p. 27)
6. (Bakare, 2009, p. 218)
8. (Hurst, 1972, p. 239)
9. (De Bont, 2010, p. 144)
10. (Oliver, 1995, p. 6).
11. (qtd. in Sandra Uray-Kennett, 2011, p. 124
12. (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 28
13. to get to the normal (Frost, 1916, p. 1).
14. (Gear et al. 2022, p. 1).
15. (Hickok, 2009, p. 161
18. (Dugas et al, 1996, p. 455
20. (Salzinger et al, 1970, p. 258-76)
21. (van Peer and Hakemulder, 2007, p. 547
22. (Soyinka, 2001, p. 264),
(Freud 23, 1893/1895, p. 46; Nietzsche 24, 2006, p. 28; Laing 25, 1959, p. 65; Foucault 26, 1961, p. 65),

(Freud 23, 1893/1895, p. 46; Nietzsche 24, 2006, p. 28; Laing 25, 1959, p. 65; Foucault 26, 1961, p. 65),

"Degeneration"

 Degeneration

  Degeneration, 1895, viii

  (Barthes, 1967, p.

  (McKeon, 1994, p. 18


  “Newcomer” 33 (17)

 awaiting “Initiations” (6

 and a grand reception by the “Watermaid” (10)

 at “The Passage” page?

 (xi).

 (Paul Maurice Legrain, 1886, p. 45)

 (Febian et al, 2016, p. 4)

 (xiv)

 (57)

 (Laing, 1990, p. 79)

 (23).

 (Keats, 1960, p. 356


 (67).

 (Eliot, 1962, p. 470)

 Idoma

 ( 6-9)

 (17-19)

 (69).

 (Browning , 1996, p. 645)

 (67)

 (69).


 (35).

 (50)


 (64)
60 (xii).


Bakare, M. O. (2009). Morbid and insight poetry: A glimpse at schizophrenia through the window of poetry. Journal of Creativity in Mental Health, 4, 217-224


Freud, S. (/1893/1895) Studies on Hysteria
http://www.valas.fr PDF
Gear, C. et al. (2022). If can imagine it, we can build it: Developing complexity theory-informed methodologies.” International Journal of Qualitative Methods vol. 21, p. 1-11.
Hickok, L. P. (2009). Rational psychology or The subjective idea and the objective law of all intelligence.
Leech, G. (1965). This bread I break – Language and interpretation:
Review of English
Literature 6, 66–75.
Legrain, P. M. (1886) qtd. in Max Nordau (1895) Degeneration, New York, D. Appleton and Company.
Pierce, C. S. (2007). The Monist 2 (1891/1892), 533, Copyright, ProQuest LLC.