

## Challenging Patriarchy and Reimagining Womanhood: Afrocentric and Postmodern Aesthetics in Ifeoma Chinwuba's *African Romance*

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**Abstract:** *Ifeoma Chinwuba's African Romance, a single-breath choreo-poem that challenges patriarchal structures and reimagines female agency, remains underexplored despite its Afrocentric engagement with gender conflict, particularly within the institution of marriage. This qualitative study adopts an eclectic theoretical framework, combining postmodernism and Catherine Acholonu's theory of Motherism, to examine how Chinwuba deploys dramatic, poetic, and postmodern techniques—particularly eclecticism, intertextuality, pornography, parody, and madness—to interrogate gender relations and expose infidelity, narcissism, moral relativism, and broader socio-political dysfunction. Through these formal and thematic strategies, the poem foregrounds the fragmented realities of contemporary gender dynamics while simultaneously critiquing the patriarchal ideologies that sustain female marginalisation and familial instability. Mallama, the central figure of the choreo-poem, emerges as a counter-stereotypical female subject who resists objectification, rejects blind tolerance of toxic relational structures, and challenges male chauvinism, while affirming the dignity of womanhood, the sanctity of marriage, and the ethical value of family. Rather than advocating gender antagonism or separatism, African Romance advances a motherist vision of gender complementarity grounded in mutual respect, cooperation, and relational accountability. By synthesising postmodern critique with Afrocentric feminist reconstruction, Chinwuba transforms the choreo-poem into a subversive and dialogic space through which alternative models of equitable and harmonious gender relations are imagined.*

**Keywords:** postmodern aesthetics, Afrocentric feminist ideologies, intertextuality, gender complementarity, gender dynamics

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## INTRODUCTION

Ifeoma Chinwuba's *African Romance* is a single, sustained dramatic poem, or choreo-poem, that belongs to a rare literary tradition that blends multiple genres. In this work, Chinwuba integrates elements of drama, particularly characterisation and dialogue, to portray the conflict between Maigida, who objectifies women, and various female voices who reject being treated as chattels, whether in marriage or other relationships. The poem centres on the emotional struggles and protestations of an African wife confronting her husband's infidelity. Given the shared transgressive impulses of postmodernism and gender studies—particularly their challenge to conventions and grand narratives (Bertens, 2005)—Chinwuba employs postmodern techniques such as eclecticism, intertextuality, pornography, parody, and madness. These stylistic tools serve to critique infidelity, male chauvinism, narcissism, corruption, political ineptitude, materialism, and moral decay. Through these devices, she crafts dynamic female voices that reject the blind endurance of toxic, dehumanising, and self-destructive gender relations, as well as broader behaviours that erode the dignity of women and undermine the institution of marriage.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach, using textual analysis to examine Ifeoma Chinwuba's *African Romance*. Through close textual analysis, selected passages from the choreo-poem are examined to identify and analyse key postmodern techniques such as eclecticism, intertextuality, pornography, parody, and madness, as well as their role in conveying the poem's critique of patriarchy and gender relations. The study also employs interpretive literary analysis, guided by Catherine Acholonu's theory of Motherism and postmodernist aesthetics, to explore the ideological and thematic implications of the text. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how Chinwuba challenges patriarchal structures, reimagines female agency, and advocates gender complementarity, marriage, and family-centred values. These methods are particularly suited to the study, given the poem's stylistic complexity and thematic depth.

### Theoretical Framework

Motherism, Catherine Acholonu's Afrocentric alternative to Western feminism, is grounded in the principles of partnership, cooperation, tolerance, love, understanding, and patience. Acholonu (1995) defines motherism as "a multidimensional theory that involves the dynamics of ordering, reordering, creating structures, and building and rebuilding in cooperation with nature at all levels of human endeavour" (pp. 110–111). Central to this theoretical paradigm is the elevation of motherhood—both in its literal and metaphorical dimensions—as foundational to African metaphysics and socio-cultural consciousness. Within this framework, the African woman is conceptualised as a nurturer, homemaker, co-creator with man, leader, and defender of the family and community. As Acholonu further asserts, a motherist may be "a man or a woman ... a builder, a healer, not a destroyer, a co-creator with God, a lover of the child who loves and respects all men and women irrespective of colour, race, ethnicity, cultures and religions" (p. 112).

In tandem with this is postmodernism, which we adopt as a complementary theoretical lens. According to Castle (2007), postmodernism resists disciplinary and methodological coherence; instead, it provides a critical framework for interrogating the chaotic realities of contemporary life marked by the collapse of long-standing cultural values and the emergence of fragmentation, subversion, and incoherence. Ghosh (2024) further conceptualises postmodernism as a philosophical response to the ruptures of modernism, while Hoover (1994, p. xxv) describes it as “an experimental approach to composition ... and self-expressiveness of its life in writing”. Hicks (2004) echoes this by defining postmodern literature as avant-garde in form, characterised by anti-realism, linguistic and social subjectivism, and thematic preoccupations with conflict, oppression, and marginalisation. Key features of postmodern texts include undecidability, resistance to closure, rejection of metanarratives, intertextuality, pastiche, parody, nihilism, and a revolutionary ethos.

We adopt these two frameworks because they converge in their shared resistance to dominant cultural norms and grand narratives, making them appropriate analytical lenses for interrogating the thematic, stylistic, and ideological dimensions of the text. While Motherism offers an Afrocentric lens for examining womanhood, gender relations, marriage, and family, Postmodernism provides the analytical tools for exploring the poem’s stylistic experimentation and subversion of dominant literary and social norms. Together, both frameworks converge in their shared resistance to dominant hegemonies and grand narratives, making them appropriate and complementary lenses for interrogating the thematic, stylistic, and ideological dimensions of *African Romance*.

### **The Conflation of Postmodern Techniques and Feminist Interventions Against Male Hegemonies in *African Romance***

#### **Eclecticism**

Postmodernism, as a literary and philosophical movement, rejects the exclusivist and often repressive tendencies of liberal humanism (Butler, 2002). Within the literary context, eclecticism refers to a compositional technique that synthesises elements from diverse sources, genres, or traditions to create a distinctive and multifaceted work (Sil, 2000; Sil & Katzenstein, 2010). It may involve the blending of languages, narrative forms, stylistic conventions, or cultural motifs, thereby fostering innovation and resistance to fixed literary norms. By deploying eclecticism, writers not only experiment with form and content but also challenge established canons, disrupt genre boundaries, and reflect the complexity and plurality of contemporary life. In postmodern discourse, such formal hybridity destabilises singular modes of meaning-making, while in the context of *African Romance*, it also creates a fertile ground for the articulation of motherist ideals rooted in dialogue, relationality, and social reconstruction.

In *African Romance*, Chinwuba employs eclecticism—or what may also be described as multi-genericity—as a conscious literary strategy that mirrors a society increasingly shaped by the interplay of diverse ideologies and cultural currents. The dissolution of rigid genre boundaries in the text underscores the postmodernist aesthetic, which celebrates indeterminacy, decentralisation

of authority, and the subversion of prescriptive metanarratives, particularly those governing literary production. Through the voices of characters like Mallam and Obioma, Chinwuba stages a dialogic contestation of meaning and value, transforming the poem into a polyphonic space where competing perspectives on gender, fidelity, and social ethics are negotiated.

Obioma:  
But I find no roses  
Only manure  
[...]  
Oh yes!  
Only manure—  
The foul-smelling type.  
He lived under my roof  
Cruised my jalopy  
But would not commit.  
He ate my food  
Warmed my bed  
And so on and so forth  
But would not 'I do'

Mallam:  
Take care, Woman.  
You do not wash  
Dirty linen in  
The marketplace (pp. 36–37)

The juxtaposition of Obioma's candid lament and Mallam's patriarchal admonition exemplifies the poem's dialogic structure and its rejection of monologic authority. Obioma's voice articulates female disappointment and emotional exploitation, while Mallam's response attempts to reinforce traditional norms of silence and domestic secrecy. Through this tension, Chinwuba exposes the patriarchal mechanisms that suppress female expression, even as she subverts them by foregrounding the woman's voice. From a postmodern perspective, this multiplicity of voices resists fixed truth and authoritative closure; from a motherist standpoint, it reflects a struggle to restore dignity, accountability, and relational balance within gender relations.

Chinwuba challenges monologic discourse through her deployment of characterisation in poetry. Conventionally, characterisation and dialogue are stylistic features more commonly associated with prose and drama than with poetry. However, Chinwuba consciously subverts these literary conventions for stylistic effect, ideological critique, and thematic depth. In traditional literary structures, poetry often operates as a monologic discourse, privileging a singular voice—frequently interpreted as the “male voice”. This aligns with the notion in feminist scholarship that literature and literary criticism often privilege male voices and masculine authority (Emenyi, 2005;

Drapeau-Bisson, 2022; Appleton, 2024). Within this context, Chinwuba's poetic experimentation, particularly her integration of characterization, can be read as a deliberate deconstruction of poetic monologism, signalling a broader postmodern skepticism toward the idea of a singular, authoritative source of knowledge, truth, or experience.

This technique serves as a feminist intervention against entrenched male hegemonies that have historically marginalised the female voice and undermined women's dignity and agency. By incorporating dialogic and dramatic elements, Chinwuba gives voice to silenced perspectives and creates a space for equitable engagement between genders. Her poetic project reflects the wider aims of feminist literary practice, wherein female writers reclaim narrative authority by re-writing, re-narrating, and re-poeticising texts to more authentically represent their lived realities. Simultaneously, this reclamation aligns with motherist ideology, which advocates not antagonistic gender confrontation but the restoration of womanhood as an essential and respected force within the family and society. Thus, the disruption of generic conventions becomes not only a stylistic choice but also a political and ethical act, one that interrogates patriarchal structures while advancing the motherist ideal of mutual recognition and social healing.

Linguistic eclecticism is a prominent stylistic feature in *African Romance*. It refers to the deliberate incorporation of elements from multiple languages, dialects, or language varieties within a single text, discourse, or even sentence. This technique includes code mixing, borrowing, blending, and hybridisation, and serves as a hallmark of postmodernist expression. As a postmodernist tool, linguistic eclecticism not only facilitates cross-linguistic communication but also challenges language purism and monolingual ideologies, thereby affirming the dynamic and hybrid nature of language in postcolonial African societies. At the same time, Chinwuba's multilingual inclusivity resonates with motherism's ethos of communal interconnectedness and cultural rootedness.

A key manifestation of this is code mixing, defined by Essien (1995) as the combination, hybridisation, or appropriation of elements from more than one language in communication. While *African Romance* is predominantly written in English, it is richly infused with words and expressions drawn from Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Ibibio, and Nigerian Pidgin English. For example, in the lines "Tall, short, lepa,/ Okpelenge and orobo/ My husband does not discriminate" (p. 55), the Yoruba terms "okpelenge" (meaning "slim") and "orobo" (meaning "fat") are deployed to reflect the diversity of female body types and the speaker's ironic commentary on male promiscuity. Similarly, the Pidgin English expression "Cause Govt no dey build house for poor man" (p. 33) captures the poet's proximity to grassroots speech and social realities, foregrounding the economic frustrations that frame many of the characters' moral choices.

When startled by Mallama's criticism of Maigida, the kingspeople retort, "Kishiru nyariya" (p. 8), a Hausa phrase meaning "keep quiet, young woman". They further ask, "Can the nama sack its shepherd?" (p. 8), with nama ("cow") metaphorically reinforcing entrenched hierarchies and patriarchal expectations of female submission. Yet Mallama's refusal to remain silent destabilises these assumptions, embodying both postmodern resistance to dominant discourse and motherism's

insistence on female dignity and responsible agency. Other culturally embedded expressions include Efik/Ibibio culinary terms like “edikaikong” and “afang” (p. 27), while Jummai’s breast is likened to “agbalumo” (p. 17), and Maigida references “nkwobi” and “isi ewu” (p. 29). These culturally specific lexical choices enrich the poem’s Nigerian texture and reinforce its rootedness in African lived experience.

Chinwuba’s deployment of linguistic eclecticism functions on multiple levels. It not only enables communication with a linguistically diverse Nigerian audience but also reflects a deliberate deviation from linguistic norms, a characteristic feature of postmodernist aesthetics. By defying rigid language boundaries, the poet affirms linguistic plurality and subverts dominant linguistic ideologies. At the same time, this multilingual strategy reinforces motherism’s emphasis on inclusivity, cultural continuity, and communal identity, creating space for authentic self-expression that resonates with the complexities of Nigerian identity and postcolonial experience.

### **Intertextuality**

In literature, intertextuality, a term coined by Julia Kristeva, refers to the practice of citing, referencing, or reconfiguring elements from other texts—whether literary works, mythologies, historical events, or cultural symbols—within a new composition (Abrams, 1999; Cuddon, 1999). It is grounded in the notion that no text exists in isolation; rather, every act of writing is inherently dialogic, shaped by and responding to prior texts (Ahmed, 2003; Kalogirou & Economopoulou, 2012; Shakib, 2013). As Allen (2000) explains, postmodern literature often embraces intertextuality to draw upon a wide array of historical and contemporary styles, juxtaposing disparate or even contradictory codes of representation to question, destabilise, and subvert traditional literary conventions. Within postmodern aesthetics, intertextuality functions as a strategy of textual decentralisation, undermining notions of fixed originality and singular authorship. In *African Romance*, however, this intertextual layering also serves a motherist purpose, enabling Chinwuba to situate her critique of patriarchy within culturally familiar epistemologies that affirm relational ethics, communal memory, and social restoration.

Intertextuality may manifest through direct quotations, allusions to people, places, or ideologies, stylistic imitation, pastiche, parody, or genre influence. Chinwuba employs intertextuality primarily through stylistic imitation and textual allusion. The choreo-poem notably echoes the style of Okot p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino* & *Song of Ocol*. Like p’Bitek’s work—a long satirical poem centering on a rural African woman’s rejection of her husband’s Westernised ideals—*African Romance* addresses cultural tensions and gender politics within African society. The thematic core of both texts involves a confrontation between tradition and modernity, with satire as a dominant rhetorical device. While *Song of Lawino* & *Song of Ocol* focuses on a binary opposition between Lawino and Ocol, Chinwuba expands this dialogic structure by incorporating multiple characters, thereby enriching the narrative complexity and facilitating broader social critique.

Both texts also adopt dramatic and performative features, blurring the boundaries between genres and affirming the postmodern embrace of hybridity. Chinwuba's adaptation of p'Bitek's form is not mere replication but an intertextual dialogue, wherein the earlier text is reinterpreted and transformed to suit new thematic concerns and socio-cultural contexts. Through this, Chinwuba engages with an African literary tradition while asserting her own feminist and postcolonial perspectives. More significantly, her adaptation reconfigures the African female voice from one of lamentation alone to one of confrontation, ethical agency, and corrective intervention, thus aligning with motherism's commitment to healing fractured gender relations rather than merely denouncing male dominance. Although the use of satire is mainly directed at Clementina, a female, in p'Bitek's poetry, the main recipient of Mallama's satirical comments is Maigida, a male. In condemning her spouse's philandering, Mallama deploys satirical humour in the following comments:

How many ribs were taken  
From my husband  
That he is forever  
Looking for them  
In the bosoms  
Of many a girl? (p. 54)

This rhetorical interrogation invokes the biblical creation narrative of woman emerging from man's rib, yet Chinwuba subverts this sacred allusion through irony. By asking how many ribs were taken from Maigida, Mallama satirically exposes his compulsive promiscuity and destabilises patriarchal assumptions about male sexual privilege. The intertextual inversion transforms scripture into a tool of feminist critique, while simultaneously reinforcing motherism's insistence on fidelity, relational accountability, and the sanctity of marriage.

Upbraiding her husband for his attempt to conceal his age with the use of hair dye, Mallama says:

He dyes his hair religiously  
At the corner barber  
At dusk,  
With fake dyes from the East.  
Now his mane is neither black  
Nor white nor grey,  
But somewhere between terracotta and copper  
Competing with the albino's. (pp. 57–58)

Here, satire operates intertextually through cultural parody and visual exaggeration. Mallama's ridicule of Maigida's cosmetic self-fashioning symbolically critiques his refusal to embrace maturity and moral responsibility. From a postmodern perspective, the body becomes a performative site where identity is artificially constructed and destabilised; from a motherist

perspective, Maigida's vanity signifies a failure of masculine stewardship, as he prioritises sensual indulgence over familial commitment.

The second major form of intertextuality in *African Romance* is allusion—the act of referencing or echoing other texts, traditions, or cultural narratives to deepen meaning and expand thematic resonance. Chinwuba adeptly employs this device to weave together layers of traditional wisdom, folklore, and sacred scripture, thereby situating her work within a broader intertextual web of cultural and literary discourse. One notable instance is the poet's adaptation of a popular Nigerian proverb: "But the child that says / His mother will not sleep / Let him prepare to keep vigil / With her" (p. 9). Traditionally used to warn subordinates about the consequences of challenging authority, this saying is revised and recontextualised by Mallama, who uses it as a vehicle for feminist resistance by directing it at her husband's relatives to caution them about the dangers of supporting his infidelity. This appropriation transforms a conventional instrument of patriarchal control into a counter-hegemonic declaration of female agency. Within the motherist framework, the metaphor of the "mother" is especially significant, symbolising not only feminine endurance but also moral authority and protective resilience.

Chinwuba also alludes to African folklore, likening the manipulative behaviour of the "digital girls" to that of Anansi, the trickster spider figure from Akan and Ghanaian mythology. The reference invokes a well-known archetype of cunning and deception, framing the girls' actions within a broader cultural understanding of moral ambiguity and social subversion. By invoking Anansi, Chinwuba situates contemporary female rivalry within an inherited narrative of duplicity and survival, while also critiquing behaviours that undermine feminine solidarity and communal harmony, values central to motherist thought.

Further, Chinwuba draws upon biblical intertextuality to advance her critique of moral and social decay. The phrase "Reaping where you / Did not toil" (p. 19) references the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:24, in which a servant accuses his master of profiting from the labour of others. Here, the allusion is reinterpreted to highlight the parasitic tendencies of those who exploit Mallama's husband for material gain. Beyond its economic implication, the phrase also symbolises the commodification of intimacy and the erosion of ethical reciprocity in human relationships, a condition reflective of postmodern moral relativism.

Another biblical allusion, "Methuselah is in love" (p. 57), references Genesis 5:27, alluding to the oldest man in the Bible. Chinwuba satirically uses this figure to underscore Maigida's ageless libido and his continued indulgence in youthful pleasures despite his advanced age. The allusion humorously juxtaposes biological ageing with unchecked sensual desire, exposing the absurdity of masculine excess. Yet beneath the satire lies a deeper motherist concern: the destabilisation of the family caused by male irresponsibility and emotional neglect.

### **Pornography**

Although scholars have attempted to distinguish between erotica and pornography, there remains no scholarly consensus on a clear-cut boundary between the two (Eaton, 2018; Steinem, 1980; Pope, Voges, Kuhn, & Bloxsome, 2007; Campbell, 2012). However, two critical distinctions recur in existing literature. First, pornographic content often circulates in restricted or marginalised spheres, situated outside the domain of mainstream literature. Second, while erotica tends to focus on the artistic and suggestive exploration of eroticism, sensuality, and sexuality—often with emotional or narrative depth—pornography typically relies on explicit, graphic depictions of sexual acts, prioritising arousal over thematic or stylistic subtlety.

For the purposes of this analysis, we do not engage in the polemic of differentiating erotica from pornography; rather, we adopt the term pornography as it pertains to literature that reflects and reinforces structures of gender, power, class, and other social inequalities. In postmodern literature, pornography may also serve as a subversive aesthetic strategy through which societal norms are destabilised, moral taboos interrogated, and suppressed discourses on desire, domination, and bodily commodification brought to the fore. Within *African Romance*, however, pornographic representation also invites a motherist reading, exposing the erosion of relational ethics, the desecration of womanhood, and the collapse of family-centred values that Motherism seeks to restore.

In *African Romance*, pornography emerges as a deliberate postmodern strategy, deployed to critique sexual politics and dramatise the complex intersections of power, gender, and desire. Mallama, in scorning Maigida's deteriorating masculinity, utters: "His one-eyed snake slow / Like aged caterpillar / Slow to wake / Quick to sleep" (p. 15). This metaphor functions as a satirical emasculation of the male figure, destabilising traditional assumptions of male virility and exposing the vulnerability and impermanence of patriarchal authority. Through postmodern irony and corporeal symbolism, Chinwuba deconstructs masculinity itself, transforming the male body into an object of ridicule rather than dominance. At the same time, Mallama's derision reflects a motherist disappointment in a husband who has failed in his responsibilities as protector, companion, and moral anchor within the family.

Maigida himself, in describing his affair with Obioma, states: "My legs led me / To Obioma / I engaged my gear / Dipped my stick once more / In her liquid gold" (p. 32). The mechanistic and transactional imagery in this passage foregrounds the commodification of intimacy and the reduction of the female body to a consumable object of male gratification. The language of motion and penetration transforms sexuality into a depersonalised performance, emblematic of postmodern alienation and the collapse of emotional reciprocity. From a motherist perspective, this objectification represents a profound rupture in gender complementarity, replacing mutuality and fidelity with exploitation and moral irresponsibility.

Even more vivid is the description of Maigida's sexual escapades with domestic workers: "go on all hours / On all fours / Under Maigida's babanriga / And Madame's pant-ry" (p. 53). These lines

merge voyeurism with class critique, exposing the sexual exploitation of female subordinates within a domestic and economic hierarchy. Here, pornography functions not as spectacle but as social diagnosis, revealing how patriarchal privilege intersects with class power to produce asymmetrical relations of domination. By stripping away euphemism, Chinwuba confronts the reader with the obscene realities of gendered exploitation in postcolonial African society. She gives copious picturesque descriptions of different shapes of the male sexual organ as seen and handled by Career Mistress:

I am there to do  
The dirty jobs you dare not do at home.  
I touch all things  
Smile till my jaws numb,  
Handle big stuff and small,  
Copious and meagre.  
I handle stuff,  
Smelly and rough,  
Patchy and pimply  
Cut, mal-cut and uncut.  
Some nauseous like the reed  
Others hanging  
Like a punching bag  
Ready to strike (p. 101)

This graphic inventory of the male body reverses conventional pornographic objectification by subjecting masculinity itself to scrutiny and fragmentation. Rather than erotic celebration, the tone evokes fatigue, disgust, and emotional detachment. The female speaker's clinical narration underscores her alienation, suggesting not empowerment but commodified labour and psychological desensitisation. From a postmodern standpoint, the body becomes desacralised and reduced to a fragmented signifier; from a motherist perspective, the excerpts reveal the tragic dehumanisation of womanhood when sexuality is severed from dignity, affection, and communal responsibility.

The poet does not limit her depiction of sexuality to “clean” or conventional expressions of erotic desire. Instead, *African Romance* explores sexual acts that transgress normative boundaries, including sadomasochism and oral sex, further reinforcing the poem's postmodern aesthetic of taboo-breaking. An instance of this transgressive sexual imagery is found in Mallama's caustic commentary on the women her husband patronises: “And the full-lipped / Addicted to the organ / Of the male specie [sic]” (p. 56). This metaphorical but unmistakable allusion reflects postmodern literature's willingness to confront culturally silenced sexual practices, while simultaneously critiquing the excesses of unrestrained desire.

In *African Romance*, sexual explicitness is not gratuitous but strategically deployed to reflect the fragmented moral order of a society grappling with cultural collision, gender imbalance, and postcolonial contradictions. As a postmodern text, it thrives on these disruptions, using the body, particularly the female body, as both site and symbol of cultural, political, and ideological contestation. Career Mistress's narration of her sexual escapades and those of the digital girls portrays sadomasochism:

I have heard tell  
That love with the digital girls  
Is fraught with danger  
From accidental pinches and scratches  
Fatal butts  
To life-threatening diseases (p. 52)

When I am kicked about  
Like a rubber ball  
And flogged  
For fun  
[...]  
What of when I am tied  
Like a barbeque chicken  
Like a ram to be slaughtered (p. 103)

Once he passed piss on me  
And the thicker stuff  
Runny and slithery  
Slid down my thighs  
In the heat of passion (p. 105)

These scenes intensify the poem's critique of sexual dehumanisation by depicting the female body as a theatre of violence, humiliation, and commodified submission. The language of bondage, bodily violation, and degradation foregrounds the asymmetrical power relations embedded within these encounters. While postmodernism allows such taboo-breaking representations to expose the collapse of ethical boundaries, Motherism provides the ethical counterpoint through which these acts are read as symptomatic of a society that has abandoned respect for womanhood and the sanctity of human intimacy.

Chinwuba exploits these depictions to illustrate that in the postmodern world, sexual intercourse has transcended conventional boundaries, encroaching into bizarre and morally ambiguous terrains. Through graphic, explicit, and sensually charged illustrations, *African Romance* presents pornography not merely as spectacle, but as a symbolic register of male subjugation of women. In the sexual scenes described, the woman functions as a sexual object, a figure subjected to

exploitation and symbolic torture, evoking the image of a sexual slave whose suffering serves the pleasure and dominance of her male clients. The choreo-poem's cinematic representation of sexual images aligns it with the visual grammar of television—what Marc O'Day (2001) identifies as the “postmodern medium par excellence.” In this sense, Chinwuba merges poetic performance with visual intensity, blurring the lines between text and screen, between literary art and erotic spectacle.

Given the poem's copious use of sexual imagery, it is evident that in postmodern literature, pornography has shifted from the periphery to the centre of artistic discourse. Once taboo in African public and literary spheres, the kinds of sexual encounters depicted in *African Romance* are now foregrounded as legitimate subject matter. Chinwuba's bold incorporation of pornography defies African cultural codes of decency and imaginative restraint, thereby demystifying and desacralising the traditional silence surrounding sexual intercourse. Yet this transgression is not merely aesthetic rebellion; it functions as ethical exposure. By rendering visible what society prefers to conceal, Chinwuba forces confrontation with the moral fractures of contemporary life and implicitly calls for restoration—a gesture that resonates with Motherism's reconstructive ethos.

Central to this thematic framing is moral relativism—the postmodern belief that ethical values are no longer grounded in universal or transcendental principles. In Chinwuba's fictional society, moral certainties are eroded. Gender relations unfold within erotic economies, devoid of religious or ethical anchoring. Characters like Obioma trade sex for financial or material gain, reinforcing the image of a society stripped of moral cohesion, where people “pay in cash or in room” (p. 82). This is not merely a portrayal of sexual decadence, but a commentary on the commodification of human relations in a postmodern, post-traditional African setting.

Career Mistress blames corrupt government officials for her immoral actions and justifies the sexual adventures of “digital girls” thus:

Government has no bursary award  
No scholarship mechanism  
No education aid  
For less-privileged,  
Or handicapped students.  
We are on our own  
Prowling the streets,  
To make ends meet (p. 106)

The above excerpt can be interpreted against the backdrop of a socio-economic climate that promotes an unrestrained proclivity toward materialism and moral depravity. Career Mistress's justification situates sexual commodification within broader structures of institutional failure, suggesting that individual moral compromise is often conditioned by systemic neglect. Here,

postmodernism illuminates the collapse of grand ethical narratives, while Motherism foregrounds the social consequences of abandoning communal care and moral responsibility. In such a context, individuals defy notions of morality, order, and decorum, constructing anti-moral means through which to achieve survival and aspiration. This reflects the troubling reality that, in postmodern society, money and material wealth have displaced the premium once placed on human dignity, virtue, and spiritual values, an inversion fundamentally at odds with the ethical and relational foundations of African communal life.

### **Parody**

Parody, a subset of satire, involves the imitation of an original work's style, tone, or structure, often through exaggeration or distortion for comedic or ironic effect (Cuddon, 1999). It contrasts or highlights differences in order to critique the original, usually with an element of irreverent playfulness. Parody draws upon the themes, motifs, and stylistic features of a pre-existing work, typically to provoke humour, mockery, or critical reflection (Seucan, 2015). Within postmodern aesthetics, parody functions as a destabilising strategy that interrogates inherited meanings, deconstructs cultural codes, and subverts dominant ideological assumptions through mimicry and ironic inversion. In *African Romance*, however, parody also serves a motherist function, enabling Chinwuba to challenge patriarchal distortions while simultaneously advancing ethical correction, relational accountability, and the restoration of social balance. In other words, Chinwuba employs parody both correctively and derisively, imitating and deflating certain literary and non-literary styles while comically linking them to her subject matter.

For example, the line “You poured dry sand / Into the tuwo of our togetherness” (p. 9) parodies the popular Nigerian Pidgin expression “You put sand for my garri,” which metaphorically conveys the idea of someone disrupting another's plans or progress. By substituting garri with tuwo—a culturally specific staple associated with northern Nigerian cuisine—Chinwuba localises and resemanticises the idiom, embedding it within the socio-cultural milieu of the poem. The phrase metaphorically captures the contamination of marital harmony through betrayal and infidelity. From a postmodern perspective, this linguistic reworking exemplifies textual playfulness and semantic displacement; from a motherist standpoint, it signifies the disruption of conjugal cohesion and the erosion of the relational trust upon which family stability depends.

In addition, parody is deployed correctively in the statement: “But the child that says / His mother will not sleep / Let him prepare to keep vigil” (p. 9). The statement parodies an indigenous Nigerian saying that does not originally contain the structure “Let him prepare to keep vigil” (“He who says his mother will not sleep, will not also sleep”). Here, Chinwuba appropriates and reconstitutes a familiar proverbial form, extending its semantic force through deliberate modification. This act of textual distortion is characteristic of postmodern parody, which resists fixed formulations and generates new meanings through recontextualisation. At the same time, the invocation of the maternal figure is deeply resonant within motherist discourse. The “mother” here transcends biological identity to become a symbolic locus of endurance, authority, and moral legitimacy. Mallama's appropriation of the proverb transforms it into a performative assertion of female

agency and resistance, warning those who threaten her dignity that they too will bear the consequences of social disequilibrium.

In these instances, the use of parody is achieved through allusion to and the deliberate distortion of the principal characteristics of the original forms of the texts. Through this intertextual mimicry, Chinwuba destabilises familiar linguistic and cultural formulations, compelling readers to reassess conventional assumptions about gender, authority, and justice. Parody thus functions not merely as comic ornamentation but as a critical mode of ideological intervention.

Similarly, the poet parodies the game of soccer thus:

In this game our husband plays  
He has shown me a red card  
For no foul of mine  
And ordered me out of the pitch (p. 18).

Here, Chinwuba deploys parody derisively by presenting a scenario in which the female character is unjustly shown a red card despite having committed no infringement. This contrasts sharply with the established rules of soccer, where a red card is used to dismiss a player from the field for a serious violation. Through this metaphorical transposition, domestic relations are reimagined as a competitive arena governed by arbitrary masculine authority. The sporting lexicon serves as an ironic framework through which patriarchal injustice is rendered both visible and absurd.

From a postmodern perspective, this parodic appropriation of soccer discourse exemplifies genre displacement and symbolic inversion, where the logic of one social system is transferred onto another to expose hidden structures of domination. The arbitrary issuance of the “red card” signifies the asymmetrical power dynamics embedded in patriarchal marriage, where women are often subjected to blame, exclusion, or emotional displacement without just cause. Within the motherist framework, however, the image carries additional ethical significance. Mallama’s exclusion from the “pitch” symbolises not merely personal rejection but the disruption of the woman’s rightful place within the domestic and communal order. Her protest thus becomes an act of moral resistance, challenging the normalisation of female disposability and demanding relational justice.

Through this exaggerated and ironic reversal, the poet ridicules the insensitivity of the male character—one who, whether overtly or subtly, has been empowered by societal norms to “discard” the woman at will. Chinwuba’s use of parody therefore transcends humour to become a dual strategy of postmodern deconstruction and motherist reconstruction. By exposing the absurdities of patriarchal behaviour through comic distortion, she not only critiques entrenched gender inequities but also gestures toward the ethical restoration of dignity, reciprocity, and harmony within human relationships.

### **Madness**

Madness, with its comic and tragic aspects, has long been a prominent literary trope, drawing considerable critical attention (Nazemi, Maleki, & Laguna Mariscal, 2022; Fridrichová, 2008). In this study, we adopt the conceptualisation of madness presented by Adolph (2022), where it is viewed through social, cultural, political, and personal lenses rather than as a manifestation of neurochemical imbalances or cognitive dysfunctions. In this context, madness serves as a hermeneutic lens for exploring issues such as alienation, criminality, and evolving theories of perception and consciousness (Brason, 2019). As a literary device, madness enables authors to interrogate the instability of reason, probe the complexities of the human psyche, challenge normative structures, and symbolise the fragility of both individual consciousness and collective moral order.

In *Romance*, Chinwuba employs the trope of madness to evoke epistemological uncertainty, moral ambiguity, and the absence of finality or closure. This resistance to definitive conclusions mirrors a central tenet of postmodernism: the destabilisation of absolute truths in ethics, language, consciousness, and perception. Madness, in this sense, functions as a postmodern discursive strategy that unsettles interpretive certainty and undermines authoritative claims to knowledge. Yet, within the motherist framework, this same instability may be read as symptomatic of a society estranged from the ethical principles of relational harmony, communal responsibility, and emotional balance. The madness in the text thus signifies not merely psychological disturbance, but a broader social and moral disorientation.

Accordingly, no conclusive judgment is passed on the actions of the “digital girls” or those of Maigida. Instead, the epilogue is delivered by a character named Mad Man, whose presence complicates the notion of narrative authority. His contribution does not signify the resolution of conflict or the cessation of verbal exchanges; rather, it suggests a pause that allows characters to regroup for further confrontation—underscoring the postmodern idea that discourse is never truly concluded. By assigning the final utterance to a socially marginal figure, Chinwuba subverts traditional narrative hierarchies and privileges the voice conventionally associated with irrationality. This inversion exemplifies postmodernism’s scepticism toward authorised centres of meaning, where truth may emerge most powerfully from the periphery.

Mad offers a bleak and cynical interpretation of love, claiming that its ultimate end is to “cheat and deceive and betray” (p. 129). Since the utterances of a lunatic are not typically taken at face value, Chinwuba strategically uses the trope of madness to avoid offering a definitive moral stance on the characters’ behaviours. Rather than functioning as a straightforward moral arbiter, Mad Man occupies an ambiguous epistemic space—simultaneously discredited and strangely insightful. Through this paradox, *African Romance* expresses incredulity toward metanarratives through Mad Man’s unconventional and subversive view of love. Mad Man deconstructs the concept of love that many grand narratives have popularised as a panacea for peaceful coexistence among humans:

Love,  
Do not rejoice  
Though many have termed thee  
Beautiful and gay  
For you are not so (p. 129)

This apostrophic denunciation of love radically inverts conventional humanistic and religious conceptions that idealise love as redemptive, sacred, and transformative. Through personification and negation, Mad Man strips love of its metaphysical prestige, exposing it instead as a site of deception and emotional betrayal. From a postmodern perspective, this constitutes a deconstruction of one of humanity's most enduring metanarratives—the belief in love as an ultimate moral good. Love, once regarded as a stabilising ethical force, is rendered unstable, unreliable, and ideologically compromised.

Yet, the perspective of Motherism, this rejection of love is profoundly tragic. Motherism is fundamentally rooted in values of nurture, cooperation, empathy, and relational healing. Mad Man's cynicism therefore signals not the failure of love itself, but the corruption of its authentic meaning within a morally fractured society. His words reveal a world in which relational bonds have been emptied of sincerity and reduced to instruments of manipulation, exploitation, and disappointment. What is being mourned, implicitly, is the erosion of the ethical foundations upon which communal and familial harmony depend.

For Mad Man, love neither embodies the abstract virtues often ascribed to it nor possesses the redemptive power to rescue humanity from chaotic existence. His pessimistic view implies that the doctrines of love, as found in grand metanarratives like the Holy Bible, have lost their sacredness and credibility in the face of humanity's so-called progress and emancipation. This reflects the postmodern condition of incredulity toward transcendental ideals, where inherited truths are no longer accepted as self-evident or morally binding.

In contrast, Lamont (1997), a staunch humanist, argues that "Humanism, having its ultimate faith in humankind, believes that human beings possess the power or potentiality of solving their own problems through reliance primarily upon reason and scientific method applied with courage and vision" (p. 14). However, postmodern thinkers challenge this optimism, pointing out that reason itself has often been used to legitimise various forms of oppression (Bennett & Royle, 2004). In this light, Hicks (2004) asserts that postmodernism functions as an activist response against the alliance between reason and power. Mad Man's speech may therefore be read as a symbolic rejection not only of emotional idealism but also of Enlightenment rationality, both of which have failed to prevent moral and social fragmentation. Chinwuba's depiction of political ineptitude and flawed economic policies further echoes this postmodern disillusionment with the ideals of political and economic liberalism birthed during the Enlightenment—ideals rooted in the belief that individuals, empowered by reason, could competently govern themselves and shape society. Through Mad Man's voice, *African Romance* calls into question these once-unshakable ideals,

suggesting that modernity's promises of progress have not delivered ethical coherence or human fulfilment.

At the time, the use of madness as the final narrative register may be interpreted as an implicit motherist warning. If the social order continues to privilege selfish desire, materialism, and fractured human relationships over mutual care and moral responsibility, madness may become not an exception but a metaphor for collective existence. Chinwuba's Mad Man thus functions as both cultural diagnostician and symbolic prophet—his apparent irrationality exposing the deeper irrationalities of a society that has normalised betrayal, commodification, and emotional alienation.

### **Chinwuba's Corrective of Womanhood, Marriage, and Family**

Chinwuba uses her choreo-poem as a discursive platform to challenge and correct harmful notions about women, marriage, and family. As Tyson (2006) explains, many patriarchal societies equate femininity with submission, conditioning women to endure domestic abuse, wait passively for male rescue, and regard marriage as the ultimate reward for "proper" behaviour (p. 88). This patriarchal ideology is echoed by Mallam, who declares: "A wife is to serve the man / Keep clean his abode / And warm his bed" (p. 21). The statement encapsulates the reductive construction of womanhood as domestic servitude and sexual availability, positioning the woman primarily as an instrument for male comfort and gratification. Through a postmodern lens, Chinwuba exposes this discourse as a socially constructed metanarrative that privileges masculine authority; through Motherism, however, she critiques not the institution of marriage itself, but its distortion into an unequal and exploitative arrangement that undermines mutuality and relational dignity.

However, when a woman, like Mallama, loses her physical appeal or deviates from idealised standards of femininity, she is quickly discarded, exposing the superficial and commodifying logic of patriarchal desire. The poet satirically presents this phenomenon thus:

He says I am too fat  
And my stomach is headed  
South-south.  
My neck is manifold.  
Mallam says my hair is thin  
And the tyre on my chest is flat (pp. 43–44).

This catalogue of bodily criticism objectifies Mallama by reducing her value to her physical appearance and reproductive desirability. The fragmented description of her body reflects the postmodern commodification of identity, where the female body becomes a site of aesthetic surveillance and symbolic depreciation. Yet Chinwuba's portrayal also invites a motherist reading, foregrounding the injustice of a system that fails to honour women beyond their bodily utility, despite their emotional labour and domestic contributions. Mallama's response to this humiliation is to walk away from her egocentric husband:

I am going, going, going  
To sack you  
Hear, hear, his-people,  
I have spoken.  
I shall sack that good-for-nothing  
That thinks himself a man. (p. 8)

This declaration constitutes a radical act of female agency and discursive resistance. In patriarchal traditions, it is typically unheard of for a wife to “sack” her husband; by reversing this normative power dynamic, Chinwuba destabilises conventional gender hierarchies and repositions the woman as an autonomous moral subject. From a postmodern perspective, Mallama’s utterance deconstructs the patriarchal metanarrative that locates authority exclusively in male hands. Yet her resistance is not nihilistic or anti-marital. Within the motherist framework, her departure functions as an ethical boundary-setting mechanism—a rejection not of marriage itself, but of a version of marriage that threatens her dignity, humanity, and psychological well-being.

Mallama does not conform to the stereotypical mould of women who regard marriage as the “only desirable reward,” particularly when the man fails to provide exemplary leadership for his family. Through this portrayal, Chinwuba does not reject African womanhood as submissive; rather, she distinguishes between blind submission and principled resistance. Submission, in motherist thought, is not synonymous with self-erasure; it must be balanced with self-respect, mutual accountability, and the preservation of human dignity.

The foregoing censure of patriarchal traditions notwithstanding, Mallama also directs her criticisms at her fellow women, who “increase the problems and sorrows / Of the sistren” (p. 41). She says:

We women are our worst enemies,  
We see a man  
Accounted for,  
A man that is wived  
Yet we admit his advances  
We contrive and plot  
To divert his attention  
From his homestead,  
We lure him away  
From a sister.  
We increase the problems and sorrows  
Of the sistren. (p. 41)

This passage exemplifies Chinwuba’s refusal to reduce gender oppression to a simplistic male-versus-female binary. While postmodernism encourages the destabilisation of essentialist

categories, Motherism demands communal responsibility and ethical solidarity among women. Mallama's critique acknowledges that some women actively participate in the structures that undermine female dignity and marital stability. By foregrounding this intra-gender complicity, Chinwuba calls for a reconstructive feminist consciousness rooted in sisterhood, empathy, and collective accountability.

Her grievances extend beyond her husband's licentiousness to include the philandering women—Ada, Nike, Ngozi, Bisi, and other “digital girls”—who “share” her husband with her. For instance, Maigida is willing to disregard Mallama because of Jummai's breasts, described as “Round like agbalumo, / Point up to heaven / Swearing falsely to the sky” (p. 17). The metaphor simultaneously satirises Maigida's shallow desire and critiques a culture in which women's bodies become instruments of competition and displacement. From the following comments, we understand that Maigida's diverted attention has ruined his home and brought hardship to Mallama:

Of what use is a wife  
When my husband is home-less  
[...]  
Our carpet is tattered  
Our roof leaks a-plenty  
The curtains are faded  
The chair torn in places  
I live in squalor because of you (p. 85).

The deterioration of the domestic space functions symbolically as an externalisation of familial disintegration. The neglected household becomes a metaphor for the collapse of emotional and relational stability. From a motherist perspective, the home is a sacred site of nurture, continuity, and communal identity; its decay therefore signifies the erosion of the very values that sustain marriage and family life.

An and uncritical reader of *African Romance* may hastily conclude that the author employs postmodern techniques to undermine the ideals of marriage and family. However, this interpretation is far from the author's intent. Chinwuba's use of postmodern strategies—fragmentation, irony, satire, and subversion—is diagnostic rather than destructive. By exposing the fractures within contemporary gender relations, she advocates not for the abandonment of marriage, but for its ethical reconstruction through equity, mutual respect, and emotional accountability.

Mallama's criticism of Maigida's sexual excesses is not driven by a desire for confrontation or the dissolution of their marriage. Rather, it reflects her longing for the restoration of their broken matrimonial bond and her resolve to reclaim her husband from the grip of the “digital girls.” Her references to the love that once existed between her and Maigida portray her as a loving spouse determined to win back her estranged husband. Her efforts to keep other women away from

Maigida underscore her deep reverence for the sanctity of marriage, womanhood, and family. She rebukes those who condone her husband's adulterous behaviour, accusing them of aggravating "the problems and sorrows / Of the sistren" (p. 41).

To reinforce her belief in the importance of family, marriage, and motherhood, Mallama laments: "Mallam says he has malaria / Whenever it is my turn / On account of the young girls" (p. 15). Her condemnation of Maigida's refusal to perform his marital duties, particularly those that would lead to procreation, reflects the premium she places on motherhood and the continuity of the family unit. Within Motherism, motherhood is not merely biological reproduction but a metaphysical and social principle of continuity, care, and communal regeneration. Even though Maigida appears indifferent to the future of their union, Mallama still longs for divine guidance, praying that Allah will lead her "to the man / From whose rib / I was made!" (p. 118). This invocation of sacred origins reveals her enduring belief in gender complementarity and divine relational order. Her desire is not for domination over man, but for restoration of the spiritual and emotional harmony that marriage ought to embody.

This motherist consciousness stands in stark contrast to strands of Western radical feminism, such as lesbian separatism, which often reject sexual reproduction as a form of resistance to patriarchal domination. Chinwuba, by contrast, rejects male exclusion and promotes gender interdependence. Her accommodationist stance seeks correction and mutual coexistence, while simultaneously creating a safe interpretive space for women whose partners are violent, excessively domineering, or bent on destroying the family. For such women, leaving a toxic and emotionally destructive relationship is presented not as failure, but as a legitimate path to dignity, healing, and stability.

Although Mallama walks away from Maigida, she does not renounce the idea of marriage. Her interaction with Suitor confirms her openness to love again. However, it is evident that she has no intention of rushing blindly into another relationship. This time, having learnt from her past, she is cautious about the person with whom she would spend her life, and insists:

Not so fast  
Kind Sir, not so fast  
But  
Tell first  
The DNA of your missing rib  
Let compare my spare  
In hue length and texture.  
Tell the centimetre of it  
And curve  
So we do not waste  
Time and resources (p. 123)

These lines blend humour with discernment, using scientific diction and biblical allusion to articulate a mature philosophy of relational compatibility. The metaphor of “DNA” reflects postmodern hybridity, where scientific and sacred discourses intersect; simultaneously, it signals Mallama’s evolved consciousness and refusal to enter marriage uncritically. She is not desperate for marital validation, but discerning enough to seek a partner capable of upholding the ethical ideals of companionship, leadership, and mutual respect.

## CONCLUSION

Through its multi-vocal architecture, Chinwuba’s *African Romance* constructs a discursive space in which competing gendered subjectivities interrogate entrenched assumptions about womanhood, marriage, sexuality, and family, thereby affirming the postmodern rejection of singular truth claims and fixed ideological positions. By deploying postmodern techniques such as eclecticism, intertextuality, pornography, parody, and madness, Chinwuba foregrounds the fragmented, contradictory, and often disturbing realities of contemporary gender relations. These formal and thematic strategies enable her to expose the moral ambiguities, power asymmetries, and socio-cultural tensions that characterise intimate relationships in postcolonial society. Yet, her engagement with postmodernism is not merely deconstructive. Rather than celebrating disorder or ideological relativism, *African Romance* appropriates postmodern aesthetics as a critical diagnostic tool through which the failures of patriarchal systems and the erosion of ethical relationality are made visible. At the ideological core of the poem lies a profound affinity with Catherine Acholonu’s Motherism, an Afrocentric alternative to Western feminist paradigms. Chinwuba’s corrective vision is grounded in motherist principles such as commitment to the preservation and flourishing of womanhood and the family, partnership, cooperation, tolerance, love, understanding, and patience. In synthesising postmodern critique with motherist reconstruction, Chinwuba offers a compelling literary intervention that not only interrogates the crises of contemporary gender relations but also gestures toward a more humane, equitable, and relationally balanced future.

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