

Folkloric Metamodernism: Orality, Textuality, and the 21st-Century Folktale in Ini Ubong Ite's *Ekõñ Ñke: Our Stories*

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary moment of African literature is marked by a decolonial resurgence that seeks to transcribe the living breath of oral traditions into textual form without ossifying their vitality. This paper examines how Ini Ubong Ite's *Ekõñ Ñke: Our Stories* meets this challenge by advancing a distinct literary mode termed folkloric metamodernism. Moving beyond the critical impasse between nostalgic nativism and postmodern pastiche that often characterizes studies of African orality, Ubong Ite's curation of Ibibio tales employs a dynamic oscillation between sincerity and irony, the communal and the individual, the ancestral and the contemporary, to reactivate folklore for twenty-first-century critique. Through close readings of four stories, this analysis delineates three core strategies of this mode: formal oscillation in linguistic code-switching, affective hybridity in narrative voice, and temporal collapse in plot structure. The paper traces a progressive arc in Ubong Ite's project, demonstrating how folkloric metamodernism evolves from a tool for negotiating ethical dilemmas to a framework for epistemological inquiry, ontological reimagining, and ultimately, radical political allegory. Ultimately, this study contends that Ubong Ite's work constitutes a significant decolonial aesthetic. By making Ibibio oral performance the structural principle of the text itself, *Ekõñ Ñke: Our Stories* challenges the colonial hierarchy of text over orality and offers a model of ancestral futurity, where indigenous knowledge serves not as a relic of the past but as a blueprint for building viable futures. This analysis thus expands the geographic and cultural scope of metamodern theory while contributing a new critical framework for understanding contemporary African literature's negotiation of tradition and modernity.

Keywords: Metamodernism, Folklore, Oral Literature, Ubong Ite's *Ekong Nke*.

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Introduction

The griot's call-and-response, the moral cadences of moonlit tales, and the polysemic weight of proverbs: African storytelling has always been a layered tapestry of memory and meaning-making. Among the Ibibio-Efik of South-South Nigeria, this tradition functions as what Karin Barber (2007) calls an "aesthetic of the collective" (34), where performance and teaching blend into a shared way of knowing. Yet, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) reminds us, the colonial encounter created a hierarchy of mediums, favoring text over oral tradition. In today's world, where digital fragmentation meets decolonial revival, writers like Ini Ubong Ite face a key

challenge: how to transcribe the griot's voice without killing its dynamic essence.

Ubong Ite's work, *Ekõñ Ñke: Our Stories*, emerges from this tension. Unlike earlier folkloric preservationists like Amos Tutuola or Cyprian Ekwensi, who reclaimed orality as a legitimate mode of expression, Ubong Ite positions her stories within a nuanced, reflexive framework that is at once sincere and self-aware, moralistic yet playful. This duality signals a broader cultural shift, moving beyond the binary logics of nostalgic nativism and postmodern pastiche that have long haunted postcolonial literature.

Vanessa Guignery (2022) examines the growth of Nigerian literature, from the precolonial era to the present day. Concerning the present-day writers, she opines that:

While a new generation of poets came to dominate the literary scene in the late 1980s and the output of playwrights did not slacken (Adesanmi and Dunton 2005, 8–12), the “sense of renewed energy and commitment” (Hewett 74) took longer to extend to the novel and the short story after nearly three decades of military rule ...This renewal and broadening of the scope of anglophone Nigerian literature at the end of the twentieth century signaled a reconfiguration of the literary landscape which had been marked by the important contributions of previous generations of writers in the aftermath of decolonization, the construction of the nation-state and the disillusionment that followed. (Guignery, 132)

Ubong Ite’s work emerges at a critical moment in the trajectory of Nigerian literature, when there is both a revival of interest in indigenous knowledge systems and a reinvention of their modes of transmission.

Ekọñ Ñke: Our Stories answers this challenge with what I term **folkloric metamodernism**. The text embodies Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker’s “structure of feeling” (2010, p. 5) through three core strategies:

1. **Linguistic Oscillation:** Rendering Ibibio proverbs in English syntax (“*When the moon faints, the chicken remembers the hawk*”) to enact cultural *code-switching* as a literary form.
2. **Narrative Double-Consciousness:** The narrator, both tale-teller and meta-commentator, mimics the oral performer’s call (“*Do you hear me, listeners?*”) while footnoting archival sources.
3. **Temporal Hybridity:** Anansi-esque tricksters critique cryptocurrency scams, collapsing mythic and neoliberal temporalities.

This approach demands a theoretical intervention. While scholars like Graham Huggan (2001) have mapped the “postcolonial exotic,” and Ato Quayson (2019) theorizes “oraliture,” *Ekọñ Ñke: Our Stories*’ simultaneous investment in and subversion of tradition aligns with Gary Forrester’s observation that metamodernism “revisits modernism’s utopianism through postmodernism’s skeptical lens” (2013, p. 112). This paper argues that Ubong Ite’s folkloric metamodernism offers a decolonial aesthetic, one that transcends the commodification of difference by making Ibibio oral forms the structural principle of the text itself, rather than merely its thematic content.

Linguistic Oscillation as Literary Strategy

Ubong Ite’s *Ekọñ Ñke: Our Stories* employs linguistic oscillation to subvert the colonial hierarchy between orality and textuality. By rendering Ibibio proverbs in English syntax, the text performs a cultural code-switching that aligns

with Karin Barber’s (2007, p. 112) assertion that African oral traditions “resist monolingual containment.” The deliberate untranslatability of these hybrid phrases compels readers to a linguistic threshold, enacting what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) might call a “decolonization of syntax” while exemplifying metamodernism’s oscillation between cultural particularity and global legibility.

Narrative Double-Consciousness and Metatextuality

The narrator’s dual role as tale-teller and meta-commentator creates a narrative double-consciousness. This interdiscursivity (Quayson, 2019) uses oral performers’ cues alongside scholarly footnotes, reflecting a postmodern critique of authority yet working to re-center communal knowledge. The text thus performs a “complicitous critique” (Hutcheon, 1988), adapted for postcolonial settings, by simultaneously performing orality and questioning its mediation.

Temporal Hybridity as Cultural Critique

Ubong Ite’s temporal collapsing, where ancestral tricksters dissect contemporary issues like cryptocurrency, transforms folklore into a living discourse. This strategy critiques the neoliberal modernity that, as Jameson (1991) notes, “effaces the present’s connection to history,” while asserting Ibibio narrative forms as tools of temporal resistance. By embedding ancestral archetypes in modern crises, *Ekọñ Ñke: Our Stories* enacts *ancestral futurity*: a metamodern temporality where past and future mutually interrogate the present.

This research identifies a critical gap in postcolonial literary studies, where the analysis of African orality remains trapped in a binary between nostalgic preservation (Barber, 2007) and postmodern fragmentation (Quayson, 2019). These frameworks fail to account for the emergent mode exemplified by Ini Ubong Ite’s *Ekọñ Ñke: Our Stories*, which neither romanticizes tradition nor deconstructs it into pastiche. Instead, Ubong Ite’s engineers a **folkloric metamodernism**: a decolonial aesthetic that enacts a constitutive oscillation between sincerity and irony, communal orality and literary self-reflexivity, and ancestral temporality and neoliberal critique. While Eurocentric metamodern theory (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010) focuses on individual affect, this study addresses the gap by theorizing how Ubong Ite’s strategic use of Ibibio narrative forms, proverbial code-switching, dialogic narration, and trickster archetypes, transforms oral aesthetics into the structural principle of a contemporary literary intervention, offering a third path for cultural transmission in the twenty-first century.

Methodology and Scope

Through a close reading of four tales from *Ekọñ Ñke: Our Stories*: “Uyai and Her Ugly Husband,” “A Woman Kills Her

Husband," "An Adventure in a Strange Land," and "The Widow and Her Garden", this analysis traces the development of Ubong Ite's metamodern poetics. The paper is structured to show a progressive argument: from the negotiation of individual and community, to the construction of communal truth, to the reimagining of ontology itself through ancestral interaction, and finally, to a radical political allegory of power. This arc demonstrates how folkloric metamodernism evolves from a personal ethical mode to a tool for systemic critique.

The analysis is grounded in Ibibio performance aesthetics, particularly the Ekpo masquerade's inherent duality, to examine three interlocking dimensions of Ubong Ite's method: the textual orchestration of a communal voice; the destabilization of traditional didacticism through open-ended conclusions; and the strategic use of paratexts as 'archival performances' of cultural memory.

The four stories, "Uyai and Her Ugly Husband," "A Woman Kills Her Husband," "An Adventure in a Strange Land," and "The Widow and Her Garden," were purposively selected from *Ekọñ Ñke: Our Stories* because they represent a progression that both demonstrates and theorizes the development of Ubong Ite's folkloric metamodernism. This selection reflects a narrative and conceptual arc: from the negotiation of individual and community ethics, to the construction of communal epistemology, to the reimagining of ontology through ancestral interaction, culminating in a political allegory of decentralized power. This progression illustrates how the mode evolves from an intimate ethical framework into a sophisticated tool for systemic critique. The analysis was performed through close reading, informed by Ibibio performance aesthetics, to examine three interlocking dimensions of Ubong Ite's method: the textual orchestration of a communal voice, the destabilization of traditional didacticism through open-ended conclusions, and the strategic use of paratexts as archival performances of cultural memory. This methodological approach traces how each story enacts the constitutive oscillations, formal, affective, and temporal, that define the folkloric metamodern mode.

Theoretical Framework: Folkloric Metamodernism as Decolonial Aesthetic

Drawing upon Vermeulen and van den Akker's formulation of an "oscillatory structure of feeling" (2010, pp. 5–6), this analysis theorises the emergence of a **folkloric metamodernism** in postcolonial African literature. A critical response to postmodernism's affective and political limitations, metamodernism is defined by its constitutive oscillation between seemingly oppositional poles, sincerity and irony, faith and doubt, nostalgia and progress. This "both/and" logic, which rehabilitates affective authenticity without sacrificing formal self-awareness (Gibbons, 2015), proves particularly generative for postcolonial contexts

characterised by what Achille Mbembe terms "temporal layering" (2001).

Exemplified by Ini Ubong Ite's *Ekọñ Ñke: Our Stories*, this folkloric mode strategically avoids the dual pitfalls of nostalgic nativism and postmodern pastiche. Instead, it enacts a narrative duality where ancestral proverbs coexist with academic commentary and mythic tricksters critique contemporary neoliberalism. This formal hybridity, akin to what Homi Bhabha recognises as a Third Space (1994), enables a return to grand narratives *through* irony, revisiting what Forrester describes as "modernism's utopian impulses through postmodernism's skeptical lens" (2013, p. 112). The text's performative voice, which invokes oral storytelling's communal "we" while footnoting archival sources, neither romanticises tradition nor surrenders to postmodern skepticism. It exemplifies what Alison Gibbons identifies as metamodernism's "reclaimed authenticity" (2015), where emotional sincerity persists precisely through textual self-reflexivity.

Crucially, this oscillatory mode extends beyond aesthetics to epistemology. For Ite, folklore and myth become not a nostalgic refuge but a form of what Mbembe calls "recursive temporality" (2001), a means of asserting cultural sovereignty against neoliberal homogeneity. The reactivation of trickster figures to dissect cryptocurrency scams, for instance, collapses mythic and neoliberal temporalities to reveal both as constructed, competing narratives. In this sense, *Ekọñ Ñke* embodies a **decolonial oscillation**: a metamodern praxis that harnesses traditional forms for contemporary cultural labour, affirming their vitality without denying their mediation.

Therefore, this paper argues that Ite's work constitutes an active intervention, not mere preservation. Its framing as a "talking drum, some will hear the rhythm, others the warning" functions as a metamodern manifesto, demanding a reading that holds multiple, simultaneous truths in productive tension. By transposing Ibibio oral aesthetics into a written, performative archive, Ite navigates beyond the critical impasse in studies of African orality, which often vacillates between lamenting tradition's erosion or celebrating its postmodern fragmentation (Barber, 2007; Quayson, 2019). He challenges what Karin Barber identifies as the "textualization trap" (2007, p. 34), demonstrating that literary form can amplify, rather than sterilise, oral vitality. Thus, folkloric metamodernism offers a vital third path, one that refuses to bifurcate tradition and modernity and instead stages their necessary, dynamic entanglement.

The core of this folkloric metamodernism is a constitutive oscillation, a dynamic movement between poles that Western metamodern theory often frames in individualistic terms (sincerity/irony, hope/despair). In *Ekọñ Ñke: Our Stories*, this oscillation is fundamentally communal. It is characterized by three interconnected strategies:

1. **Formal Oscillation:** This strategy subverts the colonial hierarchy of text over orality through deliberate code-switching. Ubong Ite's rendering of Ibibio proverbs within English syntax creates a hybrid literary language that performs cultural translation, compelling the reader to inhabit a linguistic threshold.
2. **Affective Hybridity:** Here, the text merges the communal sincerity of oral storytelling with the reflexive irony of literary fiction. The narrative voice achieves a "reclaimed authenticity" (Gibbons, 2015), fostering genuine emotional investment while maintaining self-aware critique. This creates a collective emotional sincerity, or communal affective realism, rooted in Ibibio cosmology.
3. **Temporal Collapse:** Ubong Ite actively collapses mythic and contemporary temporalities, embedding ancestral archetypes like the trickster within neoliberal phenomena like cryptocurrency scams. This does not simply "update" folklore but exposes the mythic underpinnings of modernity itself, enacting a form of ancestral futurity where the past actively interrogates and resources the present.

This framework's utility lies in its capacity to theorize these dualities without reducing them to binaries. Where a postmodern reading might emphasize the text's fragmentation, and a modernist one its cultural preservation, a metamodern lens attends to their productive tension, which Vermeulen and van den Akker call "informed naivety" (2010). This allows us to read *Ekofñ Ñke: Our Stories as Participating in what Homi Bhabha identifies as culture's "interstitial intimacy" (1994): a space where tradition and innovation mutually reconfigure one another through a process of decolonial oscillation.*

The following close readings of four purposively selected stories: "Uyai and Her Ugly Husband," "A Woman Kills Her Husband," "An Adventure in a Strange Land," and "The Widow and Her Garden", will trace the evolution of this decolonial aesthetic. The analysis moves from the negotiation of individual and community ethics to the construction of communal epistemology, to a radical reimagining of ontology and ancestral futurity, culminating in a political allegory of decentralized power. This progression demonstrates how folkloric metamodernism functions as an increasingly sophisticated tool for cultural and systemic critique.

Analysis

"Uyai and Her Ugly Husband" – The Dialogic Construction of Metamodern Ethics

The tale "Uyai and Her Ugly Husband" serves as the foundational layer of Ubong Ite's project, staging a direct confrontation between communal tradition and individual desire. It establishes folkloric metamodernism primarily through narrative double-consciousness and affective hybridity, focusing on the construction of a metamodern ethics.

Affective Hybridity and Dialogic Oscillation

The story's innovative structure fractures the narrative voice into a dialectic between a narrator articulating a traditional Ibibio worldview and an embedded audience voicing contemporary skepticism. A pivotal exchange on marital customs illustrates this:

Narrator: Marriage was not considered a union based on liking or loving the other partner. It was also not regarded as a union between individuals. Rather, it was a union between two families and sometimes, communities. The wife was often referred to as 'anwaannnyin', our wife. The families sought to ensure that the wrong traits were not reproduced in their families. They sought to ensure and perpetuate good physical as well as mental traits in their families.

Audience: What do you mean by wrong traits? (Ubong, 25)

The narrator's statement embodies a "cultural sincerity," an earnest articulation of a collective ethos. This is immediately challenged by the audience's question, which injects modern, psychological skepticism. Ubong Ite refuses to resolve this tension didactically. Instead, the narrative holds both positions in a state of productive oscillation, creating a dialogic space that prevents the tale from devolving into either nostalgic nativism or cynical deconstruction. This technique exemplifies Alison Gibbons's observation that metamodern texts "revisit sincerity and affect, but with a concurrent awareness of its constructedness" (34). The sincerity is performed, yet its ideological foundations are scrutinized, creating a Homi Bhabha-esque "Third Space of communication" where cultural authority is negotiated.

Formal Oscillation and Temporal Collapse

Ubong Ite's linguistic strategy further enacts this oscillation. The description of the protagonist, Uyai, is a case study in cultural code-switching, moving from the deeply specific Ibibio simile *aduekeyop* (ripe, fleshy palmfruit) to the modern, globalized descriptor "chocolate in complexion." This is not mere translation but a deliberate act of linguistic layering that performs a **temporal collapse**. The prose becomes a palimpsest, merging the mythic past of the tale with the consumer-present of the reader, resonating with Achille Mbembe's concept of "time as a palimpsest" (16) in the postcolony.

The story's conclusion, where Uyai is punished for her hubris yet her critiques remain valid, reinforces this oscillatory structure. The moral framework is affirmed, but not without a nuanced acknowledgment of individual desire, epitomizing the "informed naivety" of metamodernism: a return to ethical stakes that is fully "informed" by contemporary complexities.

In "A Woman Kills Her Husband," A Metamodern Epistemology of Truth and Justice is narrated. This story shifts the focus from the tension between the individual and community to an interrogation of how truth is constituted and justice is administered. It presents a metamodern oscillation

between rational investigation and mythic revelation, ultimately arguing for a collaborative, communal epistemology that integrates both modes of knowing.

1. Narrative Double-Consciousness and Metamodern Epistemology

The story's core tension revolves around the discovery of the crime. The community employs a rational, forensic approach:

Narrator: Shortly after, a neighbour came to visit the couple. He called Ubid. He called Nkpouto. There was no response. He saw the scattered things. The whole place was a mess. There was smelly vomit everywhere. The plate of food they had eaten was left on the table. Everything looked untidy.

When the neighbour looked closely, he saw a pattern on the ground. It seemed as if something had been dragged siodsiod on the ground. He followed the pattern and got to the well. He observed that the weeds had recently been disturbed. The neighbour went and reported his findings to Oboon Efaak the leader of the area. (Ubong, 72)

This methodical observation exemplifies a modern, empirical search for truth. However, this investigation reaches an impasse, unable to decipher the full story. The resolution comes not from further deduction, but from a mythic intervention: the truth-singing bird. Crucially, the bird's song is not immediately accepted as divine evidence. The narrative shows a deliberate, layered process of interpretation:

Narrator: One person gave another a tap on the shoulder and said 'The bird is saying something. It is saying that the fair-complexioned woman uprooted the root of the fluted pumpkin plant and cooked it for her husband. And her husband ate and vomited to death. The second person also paid attention. The bird sang again. (Ubong, 76)

This process is vital. The community does not passively receive truth; it actively constructs it through collective listening, discussion, and validation by appointed authorities. The bird functions not as a *deus ex machina*, but as a catalyst that enables the community to access a truth that empirical observation alone could not uncover. This represents a metamodern epistemology: a way of knowing that holds empirical inquiry and metaphorical revelation in a productive, non-hierarchical relationship. It is a narrative enactment of what can be termed dialogic truth, where meaning is generated through communal discourse, bridging the gap between the verifiable and the mythic.

2. Affective Hybridity and Ironic Subversion

The story masterfully blends sincere moral outrage with structural irony. The audience's final commentary highlights the profound irony of the villain's name:

Audience: It is good to be content with what you have. If ToyoAbasi had not been covetous, he would have married his own wife. It is wrong to take another man's wife or anything that belongs to another through deceitful means (Ubong, 81)

This moment of collective interpretation injects a layer of self-reflexive irony into the moral framework. The audience itself performs a meta-critical reading, pointing out the gap between the character's name (ToyoAbasi - "Remember God") and his actions. This is not the deconstructive irony of postmodernism, which might undermine the moral altogether. Instead, it is an ironic reinforcement; the irony serves to heighten the moral lesson about hypocrisy and the inescapability of cosmic justice. The narrative achieves a sincere condemnation of evil, but does so through a structure that is aware of its own literary devices, exemplifying the metamodern blend of affect and analysis.

Furthermore, the punishment of ToyoAbasi, being painted black and paraded, is a form of public shaming that draws on traditional *Ibibio* jurisprudence. The narrative presents this with a matter-of-fact sincerity, yet to the modern reader, it carries a stark, almost brutal, affective weight. This affective hybridity, the unflinching depiction of traditional justice alongside the community's discursive search for truth, creates a complex ethical landscape. It refuses to judge the past by present standards, yet invites the reader to sit with the visceral reality of its forms of justice, embodying Vermeulen and van den Akker's concept of a "structure of feeling" that is simultaneously sincere and critical (Ubong, 5).

To examine the theoretical Synthesis, this story moves beyond using folklore as a moral fable and positions it as a sophisticated system for modeling truth and justice. It demonstrates that folkloric metamodernism is not merely a stylistic choice but an epistemological stance. It proposes that confronting contemporary complexities may require the integration of communal wisdom (the interpretive community) with rational inquiry (the forensic investigation) and an openness to non-empirical forms of knowledge (the mythic). This aligns with Ato Quayson's work on the "interdiscursive" nature of African orature (187), but pushes it further into metamodern territory by highlighting the **oscillatory process** itself as the source of meaning.

In "An Adventure in a Strange Land," Ancestral Futurity and the Metamodern Chronotope are portrayed in this story. It represents the most radical enactment of UbongIte's project, moving beyond social and epistemological critique to model a fundamental **ontological hybridity**. It constructs a narrative world where the boundaries between the living (Obio Owo) and the spirit world (Obio Ekpo) are permeable, treating both as contiguous, politically complex realities. This spatial-temporal collapse is the ultimate expression of metamodern oscillation, creating what can be theorized, after Bakhtin, as a **metamodern chronotope**. In this time-space, ancestral past and material present interact dynamically to shape the future.

1. Temporal Hybridity and Actionable Ancestry

The story's central motif is not merely a visit to the spirit world, but a functional interaction with it. When Nko is pulled into Obio Ekpo, she does not find a vague, ethereal

realm but a society with its own governance, laws, and social anxieties:

When Nko got to Obio Ekpo, akaananwaan Obio Ekpo (the oldest female ghost), said to her mother, 'Eka Nko'. She answered, 'lih'. She said, 'This child will not like to stay here. She will have no proper playmates. She will endanger our lives, as others may want to also bring their loved ones down here. That will not be good as our world is different from theirs. Most importantly, I will not like to be killed because of her. I do not want to die twice due to her being in our midst.' (Ubong, 144)

This passage is crucial. The ancestors are not idealized, silent guides; they are pragmatic actors concerned with their own community's stability. This de-romanticizes the ancestral realm, treating it with a sociological realism that refuses nostalgic idealization. The help Nko receives is not a magical gift but a strategic intervention. Her mother provides her with concrete, material capital:

Narrator: When Nko emerged on Earth, she was happier. Her mother had told her, go to the base of Utumo tree and take out a pot from the earth. Inside the pot which she had kept a couple of years back was some manila. Eka Nko said, 'When you dig the earth around there, you will find okpoho-manila which was used as money. It is my money. Use the money to establish your business. Things will work out better for you.' (Ubong, 149)

This act transforms the concept of **ancestral futurity** from a metaphorical idea into a **tangible, actionable strategy**. The past (the mother's buried wealth) becomes a direct resource for entrepreneurial success in the present. This is a profound metamodern gesture: it oscillates between a sincere belief in the continuity and agency of the ancestral world and a pragmatic, almost capitalist, utilization of that connection. It exemplifies what Gary Forrester describes as metamodernism's ability to revisit "modernism's utopian impulses through postmodernism's skeptical lens" (112), here applied to the utopian potential of indigenous cosmology.

2. Narrative Double-Consciousness and World-Building

Ubong Ite demonstrates a sophisticated authorial control over the cosmological rules of his narrative. The story is not a naive myth but a carefully constructed world with defined laws and consequences. The old female ghost gives Nko protective charms (**eyei**) and explicit warnings about the wrestling match, knowing that Nko's victory would disrupt the ghostly order. This narrative self-awareness, the ghosts' own consciousness of the ontological danger Nko poses, elevates the tale from simple folklore to a complex allegory about the careful negotiation required when crossing cultural or ontological boundaries.

This world-building enacts a form of **speculative realism** rooted in Ibibio cosmology. The story asks, "If the spirit

world is real, what are its social and political dynamics?" This approach aligns with a metamodern sensibility that uses older narrative forms not for nostalgia, but as tools for speculative thought. It resonates with Mbembe's concept of "recursive temporality" (16), but gives it a narrative engine: the past is not a repeating cycle but an active repository of agency and capital that can be strategically accessed.

Looking at the theoretical Synthesis, "An Adventure in a Strange Land" demonstrates that **folkloric metamodernism** can function as a mode of speculative fiction. Ubong Ite uses the folktale form to build a world where the central tenet of many African cultures, the active presence of the ancestors, is treated as a narrative reality. This allows him to explore a model of progress and success that is not solely reliant on Western modernity but is fueled by a reconnection with and strategic management of ancestral legacy. The story proposes a future built not on a rupture from the past, but on its intelligent and respectful application, a truly decolonial form of utopian pragmatism.

In the fourth story, "The Widow and Her Garden," the author examines the Metamodern Politics of the Marginal. In this culminating tale, Ubong Ite's folkloric metamodernism achieves its most explicit political expression. The story functions as a potent allegory that systematically deconstructs conventional hierarchies of power and heroism. It champions a decentralized, communal ethics where ultimate efficacy resides not in traditional sources of authority but in the collective action of the seemingly insignificant. This narrative operates through a precise metamodern oscillation, using the sincere structure of the moral fable to execute an ironic and radical critique of power.

1. Affective Hybridity and the Sincerity of Struggle

Before introducing the allegorical conflict, the narrative grounds itself in a moment of profound, realistic suffering. The description of the widow, NseAbasi, is rendered with poignant, affective sincerity:

At that point, NseAbasi was helpless. She didn't know what to do. On her third visit to the farm, she stood on the farm and sang. As she sang, tears welled up in her eyes. The hot tears fell like a running stream as they went down her once chubby cheeks to her weather-beaten purple blouse. The colour of the purple blouse, which was once dark, had seen many washes and sunlight. The fish design on it looked as if a child had used an eraser to erase it. The outlines of the fish were barely visible. The purple colour was gone. (Ubong, 171)

This vivid depiction of material poverty and emotional exhaustion establishes a bedrock of human realism. This sincerity is not undercut but is essential to the metamodern strategy. It ensures the reader's emotional investment, making the eventual victory not just a narrative convention but an affective release. The stakes are real, the struggle is authentic, which heightens the impact of the story's central polemic.

2. Narrative Inversion and Ironic Subversion of the Heroic

The story's structure is a deliberate and systematic inversion of the "hero's journey." A hierarchy of potential saviors is established and then dismantled:

1. Her Sons (Filial Strength): Fail, "run [ning] off with the speed of lightning."
2. The Lion, Ekpe (Traditional/Royal Power): Fails spectacularly; "Lion took to his heels. He didn't look back. He didn't even roar to scare the monster."

The failure of these figures constitutes a sharp ironic subversion of expected narratives of salvation. Strength and royal status are revealed to be ineffective against a systemic blight (the monster). True agency is instead vested in the most marginalized figures:

Narrator: The widow said she would not go back. The more she rejected their help, the more they pestered her. They told her, 'Mma o, owo odoinyene. Nnyin idombiomfo-Mma, a person is worth more than wealth. We are your people.' After a great deal of persuasion, NseAbasi smiled. She agreed to return to the farm with them. (Ubong, 175)

This moment is the story's metamodern core. The Cock and Lizard's motivation is not glory or power, but a foundational communitarian ethic. Their victory is achieved through collaborative, specialized action: the Cock blinds the monster (**took**), the Lizard attacks it (**kpai**). This is a narrative argument for a political model based on solidarity and the unique efficacy of the small, a direct challenge to centralized, hierarchical power.

3. Performative Orality as Archival Act

The story's climax is a virtuosic performance of orality that transcends textual description. The repetitive, rhythmic chant

Ekikotook, Mbanaokpokkpai
 Ekikotook, Mbanaokpokkpai

This literally means:

Cock picks out his eyes took, Male lizard slaps him kpai.
 Cock picks out his eyes took, Male lizard slaps him kpai.
 Cock picks out his eyes took, Male lizard slaps him kpai.
 Cock picks out his eyes took, Male lizard slaps him kpai.
 Cock picks out his eyes took, Male lizard slaps him kpai.
 Cock picks out his eyes took, Male lizard slaps him kpai.
 Cock picks out his eyes took, Male lizard slaps him kpai.
 Cock picks out his eyes took, Male lizard slaps him kpai.
 (Ubong, 176)

It is not merely reported but staged. The onomatopoeic sounds (took, kpai) are a script for performance, transforming the reader into an active participant in the monster's defeat. This technique actualizes Karin Barber's concept of text as a "score for performance" (89), but does so to reinforce a metamodern political thesis. The very form of the story, communal, participatory, and rooted in oral aesthetics, becomes the vehicle for its message about communal strength. This is the ultimate expression of the "**archival performance**" you identified, where the text's meaning is inseparable from its performative enactment.

The theoretical Synthesis in "The Widow and Her Garden" can be read as Ubong Ite's manifesto for **folkloric metamodernism**. It argues that the folktale, far from being a relic, provides a narrative template for reimagining power relations in the 21st century. Its "informed naivety" (Vermeulen and van den Akker) lies in its return to a simple, sincere moral "do not despise little things," but this return is "informed" by a sophisticated, ironic deconstruction of heroism. The story proposes that solutions to contemporary plights (symbolized by the monster) will not come from the top down (the Lion) but from the collaborative, persistent efforts of the marginalized (the Cock and Lizard). It is a work of profound utopian pragmatism, using the ancestral form to envision a radically egalitarian future.

Conclusion

Folkloric Metamodernism as a Decolonial Aesthetic is depicted in the preceding analyses, demonstrating that Ini Ubong Ite's *Ekọñ Ñke: Our Stories* is far more than a simple act of cultural preservation. Through a close reading of four representative tales, we have delineated the contours of a distinct literary mode we have termed folkloric metamodernism. This mode is characterized by a constitutive oscillation between sincerity and irony, communal and individual, mythic and rational, ancestral and contemporary, that allows Ubong Ite to reactivate Ibibio oral traditions for the complex cultural work of the twenty-first century. This is not a passive retrieval of the past but an active, strategic, and critically engaged redeployment.

Ubong Ite's project constitutes a significant decolonial aesthetic intervention. It directly challenges the colonial hierarchy that privileged text over orality by creating a literary form where the oral is not merely the content but the governing structural principle. The call-and-response format, the dialogic narrative voice, and the performative climaxes are not decorative ethnographic details; they are the very mechanisms through which metamodern oscillation is achieved. This moves the discussion beyond Graham Huggan's "postcolonial exotic," where difference is often commodified. Instead, Ubong Ite practices what might be called an indigeno-centric synthesis where Ibibio aesthetic forms dictate the terms of engagement with global literary trends like metamodernism. The result is a body of work that

refuses to be confined by the binary logics, tradition versus modernity, nativism versus cosmopolitanism, that have long constrained readings of African literature.

The implications of this study are twofold. First, for the field of African literary studies, it proposes that contemporary writers are increasingly operating in a metamodern register, one that allows for a more nuanced exploration of identity that is neither essentialist nor rootless. The concept of "ancestral futurity," as seen in "An Adventure in a Strange Land," offers a powerful alternative to linear, Western notions of progress, suggesting that a viable future may be built on a strategic and respectful dialogue with the past. Second, for metamodern theory itself, which has been largely Eurocentric in its focus, this analysis argues for a global expansion of the framework. The "informed naivety" and "oscillatory structure of feeling" identified by Vermeulen and van den Akker find a uniquely resonant expression in postcolonial contexts, where the negotiation between cultural heritage and global modernity is a daily, lived reality. Ubong Ite's work shows that metamodernism is not a periodic label but a cultural sensibility that emerges organically from sites of profound cultural intersection.

In conclusion, *Ekọñ Ñke: Our Stories* stands as a testament to the enduring vitality and adaptability of African storytelling. Ini Ubong Ite, through his folkloric metamodernism, does not simply tell stories from the past; he tells stories for the future. He crafts a narrative space where the communal wisdom of the folktale can interrogate the anxieties of neoliberalism, where the ancestral world can fund present-day entrepreneurship, and where the smallest voices, the Cock and the Lizard, can model a more equitable form of power. In doing so, he offers a hopeful, though never naive, vision: that within the rich archive of African orature lie not just the memories of who we were, but the blueprints for who we might become.

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