

The best way of treating a fool?

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Abstract. This paper tries to make sense of a piece of dialogue from Flora Nwapa's novel *Women are Different*. I clarify the conclusion drawn by one of the characters, which enables a solution.

I take notes with my pen

On Rose and Comfort

And their discourse on men

In the first chapter of Flora Nwapa's novel *Women are Different*, there is a white woman who is administering an examination. Are her words understood? A girl says that the people from the bush, who are not township girls, cannot understand her. Later Agnes and Dora are planning to deal with this girl, who has insulted them as people from the bush. Here is a quotation:

‘We are going to deal with her,’ Agnes and Dora said. ‘I don't agree with you,’ said Rose. ‘The best way to treat such people is to ignore them. The best answer for a fool is silence,’ she concluded.

‘Whether the best answer for a fool is silence or not, if she insults me, I am going to deal with her. Who does she think she is?’ (1992 [1986]: 4)

Agnes and Dora strangely speak in unison to begin with, and I have no idea who says the last two sentences. Anyway, what are we to make of this: Rose may well be right about the best answer for a fool, but the speaker plans to ignore Rose's advice?

Here is a solution. Presumably, Rose's conclusion more fully is this:

(Rose's conclusion) If you are not a fool, the best answer for a fool is silence.

After all, it may well be a mistake for a fool to regard the best answer for a fool as silence – “No one will talk to me”; “I won't get information”; etc. But unlike Rose, the speaker does not assume she is not a fool. Indeed, she regards that as a risky assumption. So it is consistent for her to accept Rose's conclusion and still answer the fool with something other than silence.

Reference

Nwapa, F. 1992 (originally 1986). *Women are Different*. Trenton: Africa World Press.