

Language and Style of Chinua Achebe's 'Arrow of God'

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Abstract - The literary artist's tool is language. Language is an important tool in literature. Therefore the success of Achebe's novels undoubtedly, lies in the beauty of his language. His novels bring a whole range of human experience before reader mind's eye by use of imagery, drawn from both native and alien sources. He uses language to explain his character's appearance, performances, activities, habits, inner feelings and thoughts. Achebe's style and choice of language do not play an important role in understanding the literary work, but also, are paramount to the acceptability of a literary work. He altered the sentence, syntax, usage and idioms into a distinctly African style which won applause from critics and his fellow writers. This paper examines the use of language and style in Achebe's 'Arrow of God' with the view of finding out if his peculiar style of writing adds aesthetics to his literary work.

Keywords - Language, Undoubtedly, Paramount, Acceptability, Syntax, Idioms, Applause, Aesthetics

I. INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) emerges as the representative of the Igbo culture, possessing, the very best of the qualities glorified by that culture, valour, fearlessness, and physics powers. He was the major exponent of the modern novel, is greatly concerned with two realities of social man- his individuality and group identity, the system of values of life leading to rampant corruption-moral and monetary. He is also concerned with the use of English as the medium of expression of African experience defining the relevance of colonial and post colonial experience to the present and the commitment of the writer to his society and African which is both functional and communal.

Achebe published his first novel '*Things Fall Apart*' in 1958. It is considered as the archetypal modern African novel in English and one of the first African novel written in English. In his writings, Achebe affirms the educational function of literature and establishes a human context for understanding modern Nigerian history: the first contacts between European and African cultures at the turn of the century in '*Things Fall Apart*' (1958), the subsequent institutionalization of European religious and political structure in '*Arrow of God* (1964)', the uneasy years immediately preceding independence in '*No Longer At Ease* (1960), the excitement and disappointment of Nigeria's First Republic in '*A Man of The People*' (1966), the suffering of the Nigerian Civil war in '*Girls At War*' (1972) and in '*Beware Soul Brother*' (1973), and the corrupt authoritarianism that has characterized Nigeria's Second Republic in '*Anthills In The Savannah*'(1987). Indeed the title of his 1983 commentary, '*The Trouble With Nigeria*' identifies a concern that has been central to all of his work.

II. ARROW OF GOD: CONTEXT AND FORM

'*Arrow of God*' (1964) represents the struggle for power and authority between the African and the missionaries and within the Igbo clan. The title of the novel comes from an Igbo proverb in which an event or a person is said to represent the will of God. The identity issues are continued by Achebe as the sequel to the issues reflected in '*Things Fall Apart*' (1958) during the colonial power. He points out the continuity of African Cultural disruption with the same insight and involvement in the 1920s after the arrival of the missionaries in Nigeria. In '*Arrow of God*' language is another site of excellence, which displays the novelist's sensitivity towards various idiolects and also his artfulness in harnessing the

same in integrating English with various shades of Nigerian reality [1]. The writing of Achebe's fiction draws heavily on the oral tradition of the Igbo people. He weaves folk tales into the fabric of his stories illuminating communities' values in both the context and the form of the storytelling. The tale about the Earth and sky in *'Things Fall Apart'* emphasises the interdependency of the masculine and the feminine. The other important characteristic of Achebe's style is the use of proverb which often illustrates the waves of the rural Igbo tradition.

He sprinkles them throughout the narratives, repeating points made in conversation. Critic Anjali Gera notes that the use of proverbs in *'Arrow of God'* serves to create through an echo effect the judgement of a community upon an individual violation. And it is also seen that such repetition in his urban novels *'No Longer at Ease'* and *'A Man of the People'* is less pronounced. Achebe stands among the most influential figures of world literature with the help of his unique writing style, he skilfully wave ancient folk tales of the Igbo tribe into his stories. He always highlighted cultural values in those tales. His universally acclaimed novel *'Things Fall Apart'* is one of the best books in the world. He had used many literary devices in his work to make readers understands the themes and messages through characters and stories. To illustrate the values of Igbo's oral story tradition, he used proverb in his pieces, such as *'An Arrow of God'* and *'No Longer at Ease'*.

III. THE MAIN THRUST

One cannot talk of Achebe's achievement in *'Arrow of God'* without mentioning his language. Like in *'Things Fall Apart'*, the twin novel, Achebe uses English in a universally accepted standard and at the same time in a way to carry his purely authentic African experience. His mastery of the English language enables him to make use of a species of language "that is clear and generous which stirs the emotions and drops anchors in the memory. In chapter I, page I, Achebe gives a signal of what to expect in Arrow.. "The moon (the chief priest) saw that day was as thin as an orphan fed grudgingly by a

cruel foster-mother". The imagery is scintillating a sort of literary echo from Thomas Hardy the English poet- and novelist known for his deep-etched descriptions eg, in *'The Major of Caster Bridge, Far From the Madding Crowd and Tess of the D'Urbervilles'*.

First chapter of the novel *'Arrow of God'* focuses on Achebe's use of reference in creating both cohesion and the feeling of suspense. This is a state of the mind that is characterized by anxiety, expectation, apprehension and tension. It is the expectation that raises apprehension and anxiety. Suspense is used in various ways especially in creative writing. In drama for instance, it could be where "a chain of cause is left in doubt with tension being a primary emotion felt as part of the situation" [3]. The first paragraph of the novel opens the vista of suspense through referencing in the text as follow:-

"This was the third nightfall since he began to look for signs of the new moon. He knew it would come today but he always began his watch three days early because he must not take a risk. In this season of the year his task was not too difficult; he did not have to peer and search the sky as he night do when the rains came. Then the new moon sometimes lids itself for days behind rain clouds so that when it finally came out it was already half grown. And while it played its game the chief priest sat up every evening waiting. [4]

Achebe has used Pidgin English in his texts, a language which reflects the way English in his texts, a language which reflects the way English is actually used by some Nigerian. It is liberally sprinkled with Ibo Vocabulary so, that it gives a feel of the native speech. In *'The Empire Writes Back'*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffithsh, and Helen Tiffin describe about the linguistic reality of Pidgin as it functioned in colonial times:

"Pidgin was inevitably used in the context of master-servant relationships during the period of European colonization...of course, Pidgin remains a dominant mode of discourse, among all non-English speakers wherever it exists, but its role in most

literature...is both to install class difference and to signify its presence” [5].

In ‘*A Man of The People*’ Chinua writes about the chief Nanga who always spoke English or Pidgin and Mrs. Nanga who stuck to Igbo literature with the odd English words ‘thrown in now and again’, Hallaw, hama you. Nice to see you again. All na lie lie.” In ‘*Anthills of Savannah*’ Achebe writes in Cockney, a variety of pidgin English. He uses it especially when he portrays the women as being stupid, but then she talks about Shakespeare,

“Your boys like us, ain ‘they? My girlfriends’ said it’s the Desdemona complex. Nice word Desdemona. Italian I think. Ever hear it?”

In ‘*Arrow of God*’ Pidgin English is used by Mr. Winter bottom’s house hold workers to commune with him. For example in reply to his queries about the native children in his compound, his steward says, “My pichin na dat two we de run yonder and dat yellow gal. Di oder two na cook in pichin”[6].

IV. CULTURAL INFLUECES AND LANGUAGE

In ‘*Arrow of God*’ there are standard British English, Nigerian English and Nigerian pidgin. Nigeria is one of such African countries where many Nigerian elite uses the Nigerian English have currency within educational and political circles. The varieties of English in ‘*Arrow of God*’ are a reflection of how the English language is used in Nigeria. They are also effective means of projecting the themes of culture conflict and disintegration of cultural values in the novel. Their speech is sometimes interspersed with Igbo words (code-mixing) and in some situations they switch from this variety Nigerian English to the native language (code-switching). The colonial masters in the novel use standard British English while the messengers, cook, policemen, servants, and other semi-literate Africans use the Nigerian pidgin .Thus it serves as an inevitable go-between medium of communication between the natives and British. Incidentally, when the same natives converse with their clan-fellows they switch from pidgin to Igbo. However a reverse-case to this is established by the

two Igbo officers who go to Umuaro to arrest Ezeulu. They purposefully address each other in pidgin and the villagers in Igbo. In this supposed command over the latter by their supposed command over the white man’s language. This displays the “linguistic chauvinism” (Ngara 69) which the British have effectively inculcated among the native Igbos.

The most important feature of Achebe’s style is the use of Ibo proverbs. Even a cursory reading of the novel draws one’s attention to a very extensive use of proverbs by Achebe as an important stylistic device. He employs amusing proverbs, ironies, folk tales, verbal rhetoric, anecdotes, invective, gossips, prayers, superstitions, mirthful, conversational styles and ludicrous exemplification. In the Igbo society for instance’, it is described as the palm oil with which words are eaten’ [7]. Achebe has used proverbs as a discourse strategy in most of his novels like ‘*Things Fall Apart*’ ‘*Arrow of God*’ and ‘*Anthills of the Savannah*’.

V. CHARACTER AND LANGUAGE

Achebe’s characters pepper their speech with proverbs: “Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (TF6.6). The sensibility and wisdom of the Igbo people becomes visible in the usage of proverbs which reflects the character’s behaviour and manner. Ngugi wa Thiong’o feels that Achebe’s ‘*Things Fall Apart*’ and ‘*Arrow of God*’, Amos Tutuola’s *The Palmwine Drinkard* and Gabriel Okara’s ‘*The Voice*’ could use the borrowed tongues in the best way, by making them ‘prey’ on African proverbs, and other peculiarities of African speech and folklore. He makes prolific use of proverbs which reflect the good and lean times which their societies experienced.

We have the following proverbs, among other in the aforementioned novels:

“As soon as we shake hand with a lepper he will want an embrace”. (AOG.144).

Nwaka uses the proverb in one of his conversations to condemn Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, for romancing with winter bottom. His romance

according to Nwaka has brought a blemish to the traditional culture of his people.

“A disease that has never been seen before cannot be cured with everyday herbs.”[8]

This proverb conveys the feelings of fear, suspicion and apprehension which people of Umuaro are beginning to nurse as result of the intrusion of white man.

VI. CONCLUSION

On the whole, the aesthetics of Achebe’s novels draw upon the use of language which he handles in a sophisticated way that is aesthetic to him. One of the markers of these basic stylistic features is characterisation through which he typifies his characters by giving them different styles. Another hallmark is the blend of English and Nigerian local language mostly composed of Igbo borrowing.[9] Therefore, Achebe is a prominent African writer who goes beyond the western literary tradition and cannons by working out a model of art/novel that is specific to him and to the African writer in general.

VII. REFERENCES

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