

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN PROSE: A READING OF SELECTED NOVELS OF CHUKWUEMEKA IKE

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Abstract

This paper examined the language, style and other narrative devices in Chukwuemeka Ike's novels. The diagnostic objective of the paper is based on the interpretative analysis of Ike's linguistic medium to determine how they aide in giving expressions to his vision as a writer. It reveals that colloquial and evocative language layered with oral resources provides the fertile medium through which Ike portrays the absurdities and decadence inherent in his society. His craftsmanship and talent glistens from effective and efficient deployment of literary style like the third person narrative point of view, dream motif, flashback, songs, metaphor, proverbs, adjectival density in which Ike piles up superlative and superficial adjectives while describing his characters which often make his language genial and turgid, etc. The paper explored some aspects of language in Henri Bergson's theory of humour which sheds some light on Ike's use of language. It concludes that contrary to the popularly held view that Ike belongs to the popular tradition in African literature; Ike is a consummate writer whose utmost concern is the propagation of a healthy society.

Keywords: Evocative language, Adjectival density, Humorous proverbs, Prose, Igbo verbal art.

Introduction

Ike adopts a simple, direct, clear and colloquial language in his narratives which enables him to present his stories with fresh insights and perceptivity that is often criticised for being too close to life (Azuike 262). Simple diction enables some writers to concentrate on their narration without fastidiously seeking or searching rigorously for needless adornments and elegant phrases that would carry the burden of their narration. In order to captivate their readers, some writers hunt down tired metaphors and similes for the sole purpose of achieving

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rhetorical elegance and verbal artistry. They pile one sophisticated metaphor upon another so much that the language becomes too convoluted beyond the comprehensible grasp of an average reader. Achebe warns against such sybaritic use of language; "The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out the sort of English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience ... "(29). Ike has a way of garnishing his language with elements sourced from oral traditions which gives his prose style the unique texture of a master storyteller without dabbling in the verbal excesses common in some fictional works. This is the reason why Ike's language fascinates a lot of people. Chief Emeka Anyaoku attests to this:

As is well known, English Language is now increasingly the universal means of communication. This is notwithstanding the fact that there are different versions and dictions of English- the American English, the Nigerian English, and other national versions of English. However, Vincent Ike and people of our generation were taught England's English, that is, the English language as written and spoken by the educated English men and women; his novels have attested to that. It is the English language as written by Vincent Ike that I urge our schools and colleges to learn. ("Tribute" 70)

Ike's socio-cultural background is always the platform on which most of his stories are set. Being a product of a cultural society that values words, his language is a dexterous fusion of proverbs, metaphors, similes and symbols drawn from his tradition and culture which enhances his art. In this paper, we shall examine Ike's use of language, style and the structure of his novels in order to evaluate how they have enhanced his literary creativity.

The Language of Ike's Prose Fiction

Chukwuemeka Ike skilfully brings the Igbo verbal form of communication into the English language to achieve congenial narration. The observation that "most Ibo novelists who write in English employ imagery, figures of speech and patterns of thought characteristic of communication in Ibo rendered as faithfully as possible into English"

(Lindfors 166) is truer with Ike's prose style. Consider the following excerpt from *Toads for Supper*:

'Amadi. My words are few. You have painted my face and your mother's face with charcoal. I have always pulled your ears with my hand and warned you to beware of these township girls. I have begged you to put your sword in its sheath because one day you will be tired of lying ding down with a woman. I and your mother were anxious that you should marry quickly because we feared that young men of today find it difficult to control themselves. Nwakaego is waiting for you, just as the water in the broken pot waits for the dog to drink it. But I knew your mind was not on Nwakaego. You wanted someone who had gone to England to study, somebody who could speak English to you. Now that you have eaten the thing that has kept you awake let me watch you sleep! Now that you have fallen into the hands of those township girls who help the gods to kill, you will understand why I have been warning you to avoid women as you would avoid lepers. When a child eats a toad, it kills his appetite for meat. (120)

The above passage has a direct and evocative language. The imagery drawn with the metaphors, simile and other proverb convey the message intended by the speaker in a manner that is vivid and refreshing. The language captures the solemn mind of a broken-hearted father. Ike often uses metaphors and similes interlaced with Igbo figurative proverbs and idioms. He employs metaphorical language when the occasion calls for it and in the right proportion of each character's knowledge of folklore and verbal art without sounding vague, verbose or vulgar. Another similar example can be drawn from *The Naked Gods*, though not as successful as the previous one: 'My son. I call you my son almost in the manner in which a child will say; this is my goat even though everyone knows that a child's ownership of a goat is not deeper than the goat's hair. When the goat is to be killed or sold, nobody consults the child to whom it is said to belong. I know you are my son because I and your mother slept together and you were born after that. We brought you up in our own humble way, knowing that we were only keeping you for Obasi to do what He pleased with you. (45-46)

This excerpt is not as compact, evocative and figurative as the previous one because, here Ike uses an anecdote to illustrate the father's authority over his son without being haughty or apologetic. The language is tactically controlled by being economical with details especially with the aspect of how the son came into being.

Another aspect of Ike's language involves the use of "degradation" and "inversion (Bergson 38). Bergson argues that degradation is a form of transposition of phrases from the solemn to the trivial and from better to worse for the sake of generating laughter.

There are instances of degradation in some novels of Ike. In *Toads for Supper*, Ezenagu who is contesting for the post of the president in the Student Union addresses students of Niger Hall during their meal in the dining hall: "Gentlemen of Niger Hall, lend me your knives and forks!" (23). This is clearly a degradation of the famous Shakespearian phrase from his play *Julius Caesar* and we are told that there "was a peal of laughter in the dining hall, and even though a few diners who sat near the high table threw knives and forks at Ezenagu, the Hall decided to give him a hearing" (23). The humour is better appreciated because the audience understands the background to the joke. Bergson's submission that the laughter provoked by degradation causes something that was dignified to appear mean is clearly perceived in the above excerpt. Bergson identifies another element of language as "reciprocal interference" in which the keys of a popular phrase are changed for comic effect. An instance is when Maud visits Obu in Aka and requests that the parents want the boy home for holidays; Silence admires him and congratulates him, "Silence offered a hand to Obu: 'You're on top of the elephant!... Our teacher would call that *two-derful!*...'" (*Potter's Wheel* 191) The word 'world' is supposed to be used instead of "elephant" and "wonderful" instead of "*two-derful*" just for the purpose of humour.

Pidgin English is another prominent attribute of Ike's Language. Ike uses Pidgin English for character differentiation. City-wise characters who are illiterates or semi-illiterates use Pidgin English as medium of communication. The sort of Pidgin English which some of the characters speak draw their imageries and similes from the urban environment which validates the Pidgin as a formidable medium of expression. Ike uses it mainly to differentiate the social, intellectual, economic and political statuses of his characters. As a matter of fact, he says: "The educational/social background of my characters is often reflected in the language of each dialogue." (Oguzie 374) In all of the thirteen novels that he has written so far, he did not fail to follow this pattern of language usage. In his first novel, *Toads for Supper*, the porters in the university, Mr Olowu (Aduke's uncle), the girls at the night club and a few other characters communicate in Pidgin English as a result of which the reader could deduce their social and educational status.

In *The Naked Gods*, a similar pattern happens. Characters like Chief Ibe, Matthew, Obadiah, Abraham and all the domestic servants and stewards who work for the teaching staff of Songhai University at Onuku all speak Pidgin English. Chief Ibe's Pidgin English is of particular interest. Speaking of Professor Ikin's wife in Pidgin English that tingles the ribs, he comments: "'Dat woman?' Chief Ibe shook his head sorrowfully. 'Dat kin' woman no be person me I wan' see first

thing for morning.' If you fill one big jar of tombo for 'im husband, make de man drink am finish, man pikin dey carry plenty load for 'im chest." (227) The peculiarity of Chief Ibe's Pidgin English lies in the kind of things he always likes to comment about coupled with the mannerisms which accompany his speech, plus the fact that he is always sandwiched among high profile academics who speak impeccable English and so whenever he opens his mouth, which he does more than any person during the council meetings, he becomes too noticed for comfort.

Another aspect of Ike's language is the deployment of Igbo words in his narratives which gives his art a note of authenticity. In addition to Igbo words, Yoruba exclamations and interjections are also rendered in their original forms generously without hampering the reader's understanding. There is a sense in which Ike uses Igbo words in his works that a non-Igbo reader would understand without any difficulty. Paying attention to the context in which he uses the words is very important. Hugh Brown makes a submission which is very useful: "When it comes to Igbo words whose meanings depend on context, there is a variety. Some are as clear as if the author attached an explanatory tag, some resist all but the most general meanings and some come perilously close to being obscure." (73) Ike's Igbo words often oscillate between those that are very clear and those in which context and syntax join forces to help a reader arrive at a general meaning. For instance in *Toads for Supper*, the narrator says: "At first, Amadi felt considerable relief at having broken the 'Nsugbe coconut'. A great deal of his unhappiness all the way from the university to Ezinkwo had been over how to break the unpleasant news to his parents. (119) From the sentence that comes after the word 'Nsugbe coconut', the meaning of the word is clear. One has to study the context in which the words are used to arrive at their meanings. Most times Ike attaches explanatory tags to them to allow his words yield their meanings to the reader without having to turn to the notes at the back of the book where strange words are explained. Lindfors calls this sort of English "Iboized English." What is meant by Iboized English, according to Lindfors, is "the simulated vernacular style" (166). The words are generally meant to function as both agents of communication and culture.

In *The Naked Gods*, Okoro finds himself in a dilemma after losing the support of the Vice-Chancellor and the other two Americans in his bid to be Vice-Chancellor through his own fault. He tries to decide whether to take a rash action or to tread gently, he resorts to proverbial meditation; "To eat *mbugu* gently does not mean that bones are buried in it" (211). If the context of the word "mbugu" is studied critically, a non-Igbo reader would understand the proverb at its deeper level by

looking at the word 'eat' that comes before the Igbo word. He would conclude that mbugu is probably a kind of meat or meal eaten with special care. Ike uses similes drawn from rural settings to localise his language. They are often deployed with a zany sense of humour. Here we will list a few of them:

- So I have to keep moving up and down like jaws that cannot rest as long as there are kernels left in the mouth (*Naked Gods* 77)
- I always tell these children to shut all doors and windows as soon as darkness approaches, but talking to them is like talking to a blacksmith at work (*Toads* 48)
- To drag your father from his farm is as difficult as dragging a child away from its mother's breasts. (*Toads* 53)
- A beautiful sixteen-year-old girl, tender-looking like a yam tendril before it develops leaves (*Naked Gods* 168)
- The white man whose head shone like the full moon. (*Toads* 56)
- She walked like someone anxious to steal a hen in broad daylight (*Toads* 100)
- The small head on a massive frame looked very much like a cashew nut sticking on to the large, succulent part of the fruit (*Naked Gods* 135)
- His nostrils distended like a blacksmith's bellows (*Naked Gods* 223)
- Although Nkechi heard the call, she waxed her ears as if she had given birth to a female child (*Naked Gods* 66)
- Dem go make you spend so so many till you fall for ground like Hausa beggar. (*Toads* 9)

Most of these similes are drawn from rural setting and they are appropriately used each time they appear in the narratives. They are pointers to the influences of Ike's cultural background. Another prominent feature of Ike's language is the use of oral tradition. Oral elements furnish Ike with materials with which most of his novels are written. This is evident even in the titles of his novels, many of which are drawn from Igbo proverbs. *Toads for Supper* happens to be coined out of an Igbo proverb that says "when a child eats a toad, it kills his appetite for meat." The title of the novel is apt with the events and incidences that happen to Amadi; the major character. *The Chicken Chasers* is another of Ike's titles. It is taken from the Igbo proverb which says *ochu okuko nwe ada*, meaning he who pursues the chicken often trips and falls. The events and encounters in the novel symbolise this proverb. Mrs Bozo tries all she could to ensure that the Secretary

General never succeeds in his second term bid after trying hard to get him to sleep with her without success and ends up losing her face. Some other novels have titles that are metaphorically inclined. *The Naked Gods* is an example. The principal actors in the narrative: Okoro, Mrs Ikin, H.R.H Ezeonuku III, are all gods with naked power and they choose to use it anyhow. There are the Americans who are determined to dominate the university by the introduction of American educational policies through the occupation of the university's position of Vice-Chancellor. Then there are also the Britons who wish to do the same. *The Potter's Wheel* is another title with a metaphorical meaning. It is a novel which demonstrates that the parents of a child are like the potter's wheel that are responsible for how the child turns out later in life. Ike's titles are always carefully chosen to reflect the thematic preoccupation of the work. They always appear simple on the surface but a critical evaluation will show them to be insightful and perceptive.

Another feature of Ike's language is in the system of using very many adjectives in describing his characters, especially female characters. This method is termed "adjectival density" (Azuike 58). This is a regular feature of Ike's system of characterisation. One of such occurs in the description of Afua in *The Chicken Chasers*: Afua exuded the natural beauty which made men crash their cars in an attempt to catch another glimpse of her as she walked past. A little above average in height, there was a glossy blackness about her skin which made men wonder whether God had used a pebble to smoothen her skin while in the creator's mould. Her nose was straight like a bamboo, but not sharp like Caucasian noses. Everything about her was nicely rounded off. The hair on her head was so luxuriant and glossy black that many people would bet she wore a wig. Her dense, black eyebrows provided cover for a pair of rather large eyes (55). All these superlative descriptions are invoked to project Afua's beauty in order to justify why many of the male folks in the cultural organization are determined to catch her attention while some try very hard to win her heart. Even the angelical Secretary General falls under her charm and is only able to control himself with a lot of difficulty. In *The Naked Gods*, the same feature is observable with the character of Mrs Ikin:

Mrs Ikin was in many ways different from her husband, unlike him, who was tall and slim, she was under 5 foot, with a waist that her houseboys likened to the trunk of a baobab, and which earned her the nickname of *gwongwolo*. One could hardly say she had a waist; for the space between her hips and her chest appeared to have been very

carefully filled in but for her breasts her circumference would have been uniform from armpit to hip. These were proportionately large. One house-wife, who had observed her when she was wearing low blouses, remarked that each breast was wound like a clock-spring under her brassiere. The final effect was of two rounded mounds in front of her chest, separated by a shallow valley, its depth being minimized by the folds of her blouse [...] Surprisingly she was as nimble as a goat. She could walk faster than most other women, even though the tremor caused by her footsteps shook nearby houses. (32)

Again, Ike piles up superficial and superlative adjectives to project Mrs Ikin as everything that is despicable. For the rest of the narration, she continues to manifest all the characteristics of a desperate whore. She is a vulgar exhibitionist who revels in absurdity. There is another example in *The Potter's Wheel*. The humorous description of Obuechina is another case of adjectival density: Obu's distinguishing features were a large head, which his parents believed carried a giant-size brain for outstanding scholarship, and a diminutive nose which seemed to have been stuck to his face as an afterthought. The nose had earned him the nickname 'when the war is over', implying that a larger nose would be ordered for him at the end of World War II when all rationing would have ended. His head swung from side to side on a torso that was so thin proportionately, that he sometimes reminded you of a tadpole. His legs had gradually straightened as he grew older, but a rugby football or a fluted pumpkin could still pass between them when he stood at attention (10). What makes Ike's characters vivacious and memorable are the detailed descriptions of their physical, social and behavioural backgrounds often with a touch of humour.

The Narrative Structure of Ike's Novels

Flashback is a major feature of Ike's narrative structure. The preponderance of flashbacks make some of his novels appear as pure recollections. Sometimes a whole chapter is built on flashback. In *Toads for Supper* for instance, the whole of chapter ten is narrated using flashback as a narrative tool; Amadi relives some past experiences and wishes that there could be a way that he could amend some things especially his engagement to Nwakaego at childhood for obvious reasons: "Doubts which had begun to trickle into his mind

following his first few meetings with Nwakaego, and which he had struggled to suppress, were now returning with redoubled vigour [...] What if he decided he did not like her anymore? Or what if she decided at the end of it all that she preferred another man?" (79) The use of flashback in this manner helps Ike to achieve clarity and balance in the narration. Amadi's first encounter with Aduke is related through the flashback technique. In *The Naked Gods*, it is through the same technique that we come to know of Okoro's sordid past while he was in America for postgraduate studies. Mrs Ikin's disgraceful limbo dance is recounted through the same narrative technique. In *The Potter's Wheel*, some of Obu's hilarious experiences in Teacher's house are relived through the use of flashback as well. Each event seems to recall another past event narrated using flashback as a narrative device such that the reader is able to gain a fuller knowledge and understanding of the happenings previously.

Then there is authorial intrusion which Ike dexterously used to great effects. Cases of authorial intrusion abound in Ike's novels, especially whenever the narration comes very close to some of the thematic concerns close to his heart. At such points, Ike tended to take over the narration with a view to emphasising issues that the narrator might only glibly recount without much enthusiasm. Other times Ike speaks through some characters that seem to enjoy his admiration and blessing and he sometimes hopes that his readers would do the same. He equally believes that whatever these characters say will not be forgotten in a hurry. Here is a classic case in point: "I consider the proposed visit an insult to my intelligence on two grounds. Firstly, it seems absurd that I should travel all the way to the States in order to study the philosophy of Songhai University [...] If the sponsors of the proposal believe that any candidate for the Vice-Chancellorship of this University should be grounded in the educational ideals of America, they should have the courage to their conviction to say so." (233) Ike's disgust for Western influences on the Nigerian educational system and policies comes out like venom in the above speech by Professor Ikin. Consider the following as well:

It becomes obvious to me that many of the foreign governments say that they are helping us but they are much more interested in planting their own systems in our country rather than help us to evolve something of our own. They are interested in planting foreign systems rather than create something of our own and giving the erroneous belief that some ideal educational system has been evolved somewhere, regardless of your circumstances you can bring it and plant it here and it works. (86)

Ike had expressed the above views in interviews at some points before and after the publications of some of these novels. Thus to

give it artistic projection, he decided to put them into the mouth of Professor Ikin with a bitter edge. The narrative structure of Ike's novels also embraces the act of reporting some crucial happenings through characters or messengers as done in classical tragedy rather than through narration. In *Toads for Supper*, rather than narrated, the effect of Amadi's letter on Aduke is reported by a porter: 'Abi you never hear wetin happen to Miss Olowu?' 'What are you talking about? Are you sure you know the person I am talking about?' 'Me know Miss Olowu?' 'me wey don' work for Oliaku Hall so-tee! Miss Olowu no be de gal dem carry jus' now go Abeokuta Mental Hospital?' (186). Similarly In *The Naked Gods* and *The Potter's Wheel*, similar situations are seen. After the students vented their anger on campus caused by the clash between Okoro's camp and that of Ikin, the methods of escape by many of the teaching staff of Songhai University are reported by Etuk Ekarika, an assistant lecturer and Polycarp.

Ike's narrative form most times oscillates between the prosaic and the dramatic. In some parts it becomes dramatic especially when the characters are discussing burning issues, a time which the narrator feels it is best to keep quiet and allow the reader relate directly with the characters. There is always the use of chorus; *The Naked Gods* offers a good example of this in the characters of Christopher Opara, Etuk Ekarika and Osita. Through their discussions, questions, comments and observations which always come in the shape of gossips, we always get to know the happenings around Songhai campus and the motives behind some of the decisions which inform the happenings. They perform the same role as the chorus in classical drama who comment on happenings and their possible consequences on the people. Though there are times when they try to be sincere with their observations especially when they have nothing really at stake, we cannot totally rely on the judgments or views of these characters because each one of them has bias for one or two of their fellow lecturers and so their views cannot be objective. Many times, their discussions centre on Okoro who happens to be their common enemy. It is through their discussions that we get to know of Okoro's dirty past in America while he was there for further studies:

Is Okoro looking for a wife?' Etuk asked in reply 'Those of us who knew him in the States know how many American girls he ruined over there. At least three of them, have kids by him. None of them knew when he left the States. A fourth girl who was expecting a baby by him at the time he left, is believed to have committed suicide.'" (163)

When they are not discussing Okoro, it is to lament their plights as assistant lecturers and comment on the power tussle between the American and the British expatriates running the school. This is a skilful narrative device to use because the comments and observations made by some characters about other characters advance the narration and plot. Interior monologue is another narrative tool which is extensively used by Ike. He puts this to good use whenever his characters are about to take weighty decisions or are in a tight corner and have to depend on their own devices or resources, especially when the issues involved are things they cannot share with any other character no matter how close. At such times, the omniscient narrator leaves them to battle with their problems without interference. One of such moments occurs in *The Naked Gods* when Okoro realises that his plot to be Vice-Chancellor of Songhai University fail partly due to his incurable desire for women, specifically his illicit sexual relations with Gladys, the daughter of the American Ambassador who is ready to go to any length to stop his Vice-Chancellorship coupled with his unbridled mouth that says more than is required.

Similarly, in *Toads for Supper*, Amadi finds himself in an awkward situation in which he could not find a girl to accompany him to the night club. He finds himself being probed by the two inner voices; one egging him on while the other dissuades him. A similar thing happens while he was on his way to Aduke's home at Ilesha to ask for her hand in marriage without consulting his parents. An inner voice probes the logic behind his decision and Amadi is left in a 'to-be-or-not-to-be' situation. This narrative device helps the reader to understand the characters at a deeper level through their own thoughts, feelings and dilemmas as a result which the reader is able to draw an objective conclusion regarding their moral integrity.

The epistolary style is another prominent feature of Ike's novels. Ike uses the epistolary style as a creative medium which normally serve the dual function of communication and narration. In many of his novels, there are letters that are used as part of the narrative medium. Most times, the letters are introduced when there is a need for bridging gaps between characters. However, Ike sometimes introduces it to perform more than just bridging the gaps between characters. Some other times, he deploys it to add authenticity and elegance to the narration. It is important to stress that epistolary style also involves other features like diary entries, news reports, magazines, etc. The letters that appear in Ike's novels form part of the narration. Most times they are reference points for later events since they are written documents. When Amadi discovers he might not be happy marrying an uneducated woman, he puts it in writing to his father requesting that Nwakaego be given a Modern school education if he

will marry her as planned, and the father complies by sending her to a modern school far away from Ezinkwo. When Amadi later tries denying making such a request, armed with the letter and the father calmly asks his son:

‘But tell me, do you remember ever writing
to me from the university about this
Nwakaego?’

‘I have written so many letters to you and Mama since I left for the university that it is difficult to remember the letter you are referring to.’ ‘I can well understand. Sometimes I feel sorry for you book people. With all those books on that table inside your small head how can you still have space for small things like the contents of unimportant letter.’ He adjusted his covering cloth and produced a crumpled letter which he had hidden away in the folds of the cloth. ‘I think this is the letter I have in mind. Perhaps you would like to read it near the light to remember what you wrote in it.’ (81)

Stupefied Amadi had no choice than to accept defeat. Since letters afford him opportunities to express his mind to his father without fear of contradiction, he resolves secretly to write another letter to re-establish his stand on the issue: Amadi was burning to talk back. But he knew that in circumstances like this he never emerged victorious. Almost every time he challenged his father’s outmoded ideas in open conversation, he lost. His father had a way of making him feel that in spite of his vast book learning, there was still something lacking [...] he would sleep on the matter and then write to his father from the university. There was nothing like a letter (81).

Letter as a medium of communication gives expressions to some thoughts that Amadi cannot readily express in his father’s presence. The same thing happens with Aduke’s letter to Amadi during their holidays. Amadi reads the letter several times looking for possible hints of love or admiration which he knows Aduke could not openly express. To his chagrin, he finds none and expresses his frustration: “University women,” he murmured, “so disciplined that they can’t let go a careless expression of emotion, even in a personal letter!” (69) Some other times in Ike’s works, letters function as a smokescreen for executing certain decisions or threats that might be difficult to carry out face-to-face. An instance of this is when the hardship in Teacher’s house becomes unbearable; Obu decides to write a letter purported to have been sent from his parents in the village requesting him to be sent back to the village for something urgent. However Obu is unlucky because Teacher is able to see through his trick but he is not punished for his cleverness. Another instance is the letter that Amadi writes to Aduke to inform her of his decision to follow his late father’s instruction

to marry Nwakaego, a decision which traumatised her and sent her to a psychiatric hospital.

Form and Style

Chukwuemeka Ike might have been influenced by some writers, one of which is Chinua Achebe, a fact which he admitted in several interviews. For instance, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* plays an essential role in *Toads for Supper*. Ike plays on intertextual influences to explain the differences in the tradition and culture of the Igbo and the Yoruba as a way of resolving the difficulty posed by ethnic differences in the relationship between Aduke and Amadi. Talking about *Things Fall Apart*, Aduke observes in a letter: "I enjoyed the book tremendously. I was struck by the similarity between the ways of life of the Ibos and the Yorubas; many of the incidents described in the novel could have taken place in a Yoruba village. Perhaps we are not different as we appear to be!" (69)

Ike uses this technique to achieve the purpose of making Aduke look beyond their cultural differences at the end of the narrative. However, Mazi Onuzulike, Amadi's father, holds tenaciously to his prejudice against city women even on his death bed, a perception which jeopardizes the relationship between Amadi and Aduke in the end. Other stylistic devices are the use of proverbs and songs. Ike's proverbs are often laced with humour because they are often introduced in tense situations to diffuse tension. The observation that proverbs "are generated by stress and conflict and also because it is within this domain that the power of proverb rhetoric is best put to test" (Yankah 337) reinforces this view. Under grim situations involving critical issues, humour-laden proverbs come to the rescue of a speaker to enliven the atmosphere. Sometimes a writer may choose proverbs on the bases of their sounds, interactional elegance, imagery, poetic qualities and humour. Thus, many proverbs generate humorous hyperbolic imagery and it is these characteristics that make them agents of entertainment.

In terms of form, the proverb is a graphic statement that expresses a truth of some sort or experience. They are often readily perceived and accepted as an incontrovertible truth. The truth presented in the proverb is not a logical, a priori or intuitive truth, (Lauhakangas 6). It is often an empirical fact based upon and derived from the people's experience of life, human relationship and interaction with the world of nature. Proverbs are literary forms through which speakers and writers project their ideas. In Africa, proverbs become the last resort when ideas are mostly cloudy and tend to be evading the technical grasp of a speaker or writer. When dealing with issues

that are lurid, proverbs come to the rescue of the speaker so that he does not sound vulgar or vague. They are the most effective medium available to writers to fertilize their thoughts. In his book, *Understanding Things Fall Apart: a Student Casebook to Issues, Sources and Historical Documents*, Kalu Ogbaa observes that the “most important form of Igbo narrative custom is the proverb [...] Proverbs are very important in Igbo language and literature, for they express the life and civilization of the people [...] Some are esoteric in the sense that they are used by groups of elders and titled men and are hard to interpret because sometimes they are oracular” (109).

In literature, writers often employ the use of proverbs that draw on striking figurative language. This is due to the need to create imagery that would last longer in the minds of their readers. In African literature, writers find more fertile grounds for this practice. Apart from proverbs with striking figurative language, they equally use narrative proverbs to garnish their art. Ike’s use of proverbs has some resemblance with Achebe’s pattern. Achebe makes use of short proverbs just as he equally uses long narrative proverbs or anecdotes to make moral statements. On his own part, Ike makes use of short proverbs in an epigrammatic sense. Ike’s proverbs are always short and plain but with humorous undertones especially if one fixes one’s attention on the material aspect of the proverbs rather than on the moral aspect as pointed out by Bergson (41). In *Toads for Supper* for instance, after admonishing Amadi to eschew dating Yoruba girls on campus and settle for occasional fling with other girls, Chima observes that “all the same, you don’t have to take my advice. You are as free as a damsel to develop your breasts where you choose” (11). If we are to concentrate on the material aspect of the proverb, we cannot but laugh and in this case “thoughtful laughter” (Meredith 21). Whoever has seen breasts on other parts of the body other than the chest? Imagine breasts on the head or at the buttocks!

Similarly, in *The Potter’s Wheel*, after Obu has tried in vain to find someone to teach him how to ride a bicycle and after expending his energy pushing his father’s bicycle from one friend’s compound to the other, he observes, “the day I decide to go hunting, antelopes learn to climb trees and snails develop wings” (33). What one observes in this proverb is the above humoristic imagery which paints the helplessness of Obu’s situation as a hopeless adventure. The exchange of proverbs between Obu and Cromwell in *The Potter’s Wheel* is another interesting instance of Ike’s humorous use of proverbs. During break time, Cromwell searches everywhere for Obu in order to beat him up for what he perceives as an act of insubordination in class. He finds Obu at the school farm and says, “no matter how many rivers the crab may ford, it will end up in an old

woman's soup pot" (126) to which Obu replies, "a man who wakes up in the morning and finds himself being pursued by a chicken should run for his life, for who knows whether the chicken grew teeth overnight?" (127). Obu's counter-proverb immediately puts down Cromwell who cowardly withdraws. The question one may want to ask Cromwell is, why the old woman's pot of soup and not that of a younger woman? Proverbs are based upon people's experience and are reflections of the social values and sensibility of the people. They give penetrating insights about a people's way of life. Crab eating is desperately going out of taste with the youth (if it has not totally gone out already) but it is still being cherished by the old and so a particular reference to an old woman by Cromwell, though appears somewhat too noticed for comfort, is in order.

There is the deployment of erotic proverbs with their rib-tingling effects as well. In *The Naked Gods* for example, reacting to Dr. Okoro's story that his life is under threat as a result of his nomination for the Vice-Chancellorship of Songhai University, his father observes that "a woman who decides to wrestle with a man cannot at the same time be concerned with concealing her private parts" (47). What this erotic proverb hints at is Dr. Okoro's initial snobbish attitude toward native medicine and charm as a result of his western education. Thus, the proverb delivers a repugnant blow to his ego and beats him into submission. Though the imagery that this proverb conjures up in the mind is savagely amorous, it has a truism which smacks of humour. Some other proverbs used in some of Ike's works have humorous undertone especially in circumstances that lend them to humour:

- If a child crawls on its knees to burn my skin with glowing firewood, I'll also go on my knees to retaliate (*The Naked Gods* 47).
- When the pot is full of palm oil, even its lid gets a share of the oil (*The Naked Gods* 72)
- If the water to wash the corpse is so difficult to produce, what are the chances of finding the chicken whose blood must be poured into the dead man's eyes (*The Naked Gods* 139)
- Only a fool would pose as a rich man when he buys his soap in penny slices (*The Naked Gods* 237).
- The man who is murdered by his kinsmen does not bleed. (*The Potter's Wheel* 81)

Ike is tremendously fascinated with songs; Ike makes use of songs in humorous and satirical ways. Almost all of his novels are permeated songs. In *Toads for Supper* for instance, while Amadi is meditating on whether to go into a relationship with Aduke, given the tribal differences

and the fact that she is overtly educated, the type known for demanding for money all the time, he recalls the song of a local bandleader: "*Dem go make you spend so so money/Till you fall for ground like Hausa beggar/But dem give you notin for your money/ Only calling you darling when dem need your cheque/So, mister, when you see dem woman, pick race o!*" (13).

In another instance, Nwakaego accompanies Amadi to the dance floor with a lot of reluctance and while there, she dances sheepishly to the highlife music playing: *Adanma, you have ruined me/You must go back home/Adanma, you have ruined me/You must go back home.* (77-78). Incidentally, the song tends to be communicating on a prophetic level; the current situation between Amadi and his betrothed wife, Nwakaego. Amadi who has had a battle with his prospective mother-in-law before he could be allowed to take Nwakaego to the party suffers the discomfort of persuasively forcing Nwakaego to dance with him. This initial song is again followed by another song: "*You may be pretty/You may be pretty/But who eats beauty? / Your conduct is appalling*" (78). The satirical swing of this song scoops mixed reactions from the dancers on the dance floor. As for Amadi, he thinks: "how true... Beauty was inedible; behaviour was much more important" (P.78). This thought obviously emanates as the result of the uncooperative attitude of his betrothed wife on the dance floor just as the song is being played.

However, the most hilarious incident arising from the sentiments expressed by the song comes from a couple a few steps away from Amadi and his heartthrob. The narrator observes that: "The dancers all seemed to share the sentiments of the vocalist as they joined in the singing, except for one teacher who was dancing with a particular attractive girl. 'I don't agree,' Amadi heard him say to his dancing partner. 'After all the eye must eat first before the mouth. I can't live in the same house with a chimpanzee, no matter how exceptionally well behaved.'" (*Toads* 78) The significance of the above encounter is to satirize beautiful women who become preoccupied with their beauty so much that they forget that good character is what enhances it. Ike again uses it to inject humour into the narration so as to enliven the story and maintain the tempo of entertainment. Ike reveals that he "enjoys listening to people cracking jokes and I find that in conversation everybody is livelier when jokes are introduced from time to time" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 84). Though Ike intends the song to bring light heartedness into the narration, it ends up on a sarcastic note.

Sometimes Ike incorporates songs in his works for the purpose of motivating the characters into action. While on the other hand, they are used to comment on the worldview of some characters in the narratives, especially to draw attention to what the author feels that is

not too good for a morally balanced society so that people can learn from them. So, clearly songs as employed by Ike in his creative works function as a medium for social commentary in which good morals and norms are enforced amidst satirical and critical humour. Dream is a recurrent motif in Ike's narratives. They are usually deployed as foreshadowers especially when some of his characters are going through emotional or psychological trauma. For instance, when Obu returns home for holidays, each time he goes to sleep, he cannot but have terrible nightmares in which he finds himself in Teacher's house being tortured by madam even after he has concluded that he is not going back to Teacher's house in Aka. We are later told that Obu returns to Teacher's house at the end of the holidays unaccompanied by his pampering mother. Thus, the dream foreshadows Obu's eventual return to Teacher's house and a possible clash with Teacher's wife. Finally, Doctor Okoro's mother dreams that her son (Okoro) is engaged in a battle with some white colleagues in the university and warns him to tread carefully. After fighting hard to be Vice-Chancellor, he is disgraced by the very people (Whites) who initially encouraged him to vie for the position.

Conclusion

A few scholars have classified Chukwuemeka Ike's novels as popular literature because his works tend to appeal to the youth. One possible reason for his popularity with the youth is that he deals with Nigerian contemporary life often in a comic mode. It is as a result of this that he did not enjoy adequate scholarly attention even with his prolific literary output; thirteen novels and a host of short stories. Scholars and students of literature do not relish studying his works even when many admit that his works make interesting reading. Perhaps a time will come when Ike's works will be given the scholarly attention due to them by another generation of critics who will have the zeal to study his works, understand what he tried to achieve with them and examine them within the framework of the appropriate theory or theories best suited for such works. Every kind of literature is important and is meant to serve some purposes and they can be studied with the aim of bringing out their beauty and relevance for greater appreciation. Chukwuemeka Ike's creative works make morality statements and through his stories he has demonstrated that immorality is the bane of the Nigerian society.

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