

AFRREV IJAH
An International Journal of Arts and Humanities
Bahir Dar, Ethiopia
Vol. 2 (2), S/No 6, May, 2013:187-202
ISSN: 2225-8590 (Print) ISSN 2227-5452 (Online)

Symbolic and Ironic Dimensions of *The Return of Ameze* by F.N. Ogoanah

Ikediugwu, Oge A.
Department of English and Literature,
University of Benin, Benin City.
E-mail: ogediugwu@yahoo.com
+2347086548298; +2348023367830

&

Ugwu, Esther Nkiruka, Ph.D.
Department of English and Literature,
University of Benin, Benin City.
E-mail Address: nkyugwu@yahoo.com
Phone: +2348023367830

Abstract

This essay highlights poverty, ignorance and greed as the major pre-occupations of the author in his novel, The Return of Ameze. The novel portrays the travails of the girl child in Nigeria. We see the girl, Ameze's birth, her childhood days, her growing up, her struggles to survive, her love

for Frank, her trip to Italy and the accompanying hardships, and her death as symbolic and ironic. In the course of the analysis, it is established that Ogoanah employs symbolism and irony to effectively realize his artistic goals. His characters are symbolic and because they are symbolic, they are deeper than they physically appear to be on the surface. Some actions in the novel are symbolic and the author uses them either for implications or to foreshadow certain future incidents. He employs irony to emphasize that all that glitters is not gold.

Key words: symbolism, irony, flashback, prostitution and culture,

Introduction

In this essay, the painful life of the heroine, Ameze, is explored and critically analyzed. In the course of the analysis, poverty, ignorance and greed are highlighted as the major banes of the heroine, in particular, and the community, in general. Through a discreet deployment of symbolism and irony, the author is able to project the above themes to the fore.

Symbolism

The term, symbolism, was derived from the word, symbol, which was derived from the Latin *symbolum*, a symbol of faith, and *symbolus*, a sign of recognition, in turn from classical Greek *symbolon*, an object cut into half constituting a sign of recognition when the carriers are able to re-assemble the two halves. According to *Wikipedia: the Free Encyclopedia*, symbolism originated in France and was part of a 19th century movement in which art became infused with mysticism. French symbolism was both a continuation of the Romantic Tradition and a reaction to the realistic approach of impressionism. It served as a catalyst in the outgrowth of the darker sides of Romanticism and toward abstraction. The term symbolism means the systematic use of symbols or pictorial conventions to express an allegorical meaning. The *Wikipedia* has it that symbolism is the practice of representing things by symbols, or of investing things with a symbolic meaning or character. A symbol is an object, action or idea that represents something other than itself.

There are different kinds of symbolism: religious, political, cultural and marketing symbolisms. There are culturally based symbols, like a nation's flag or a historical monument and then there are symbols that belong to the

world of literature. Great symbolism in literature requires enormous intelligence and creativity on the part of author. Literary symbols allow tellers of tales to impart information without rehashing a long explanation or description of something.

According to Bill Willis, symbolism in literature is used to provide meaning to the writing beyond what is actually being described. The plot and action that take place in a story can be thought of as one level, while the symbolism of certain things in the writing acts on another level to enhance the story. Symbolism can take place by having the theme of a story represented on a physical level. A simple example may be the occurrence of a storm at a critical point, when there is conflict or high emotions. The storm may symbolize these. Similarly, a transition from day to night, or spring to winter, could symbolize a movement from goodness to evil, or hope to despair. A river in a scene could represent the flow of life from birth to death. Flowers can symbolize youth or beauty. He, however, warns that it is not everything in a story that is necessarily symbolic. A garden landscape is just a garden until it is contrasted with a bustling city, at which point the garden could symbolize tranquillity, peace or escape.

Bright Hub is of the view that without symbolism, something essential is missing from language and art. Symbols allow authors to impart ideas above and beyond the literal level of the text. Symbolism in literature can be subtle or obvious, used sparingly or heavy handedly. An author may repeatedly use the same object to convey deeper meaning or may use variations of the same object to create an overarching mood or feeling. Symbolism is often used to support a literary theme in a subtle manner. Writers insert symbols into their writing to allude to a feeling, mood or attitude without directly stating the perspective or mood intended. Symbolism is supplemental to the story. It is when one thing represents another. For example, a rainy day represents sadness.

Richard Gill submits that a symbol is an object that stands for, points to and shares in a significant reality over and beyond it. Some symbols are traditional; others are created by an author. Symbols resonate with associations and it is never possible to say exactly how extensive that range is (511).

Gill's stance is in consonance with A.B. Dobie's position that a symbol means someone or something that is a literal presence, but is also a

representation of something beyond himself, herself or itself. The physical object or person usually refers to something abstract. Though other citations on symbolism are important, Dobie's position is particularly remarkable because it is the closest to Ogoanah's use of symbolism.

Irony

Irony is the technique of saying the opposite of what one means. M.H. Abrams and G.G. Harpham posit that in irony, there is the root sense of dissembling, or of hiding what is actually the case; not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects. They classified irony into verbal, Socratic, dramatic, cosmic and romantic. Verbal irony is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed. The ironic statement usually involves the explicit expression of one's attitude or evaluation, but with some indications in the overall speech-situation that the speaker intends a very different, and often opposite attitude or evaluation. Socratic irony takes its name from the fact that, as he is represented in Plato's dialogue, the philosopher Socrates, usually, dissembles by assuming a pose of ignorance, an eagerness to be instructed and a modest readiness to entertain opinions proposed by others, although these opinions, upon his continued questioning, turn out to be ill-grounded or to lead to absurd consequences. Dramatic irony involves a situation in which the audience or reader shares with the author knowledge of the present or future circumstances of which a character is ignorant. The literary character unknowingly acts in a way we recognize to be grossly inappropriate to the actual circumstances, or expects the opposite of what we know that fate holds in store, or says something that anticipates the actual outcome, but not at all in the way that the character intends. Cosmic irony, also called the irony of fate, is attributed to literary works in which a deity or fate is represented as though deliberately manipulating events so as to lead the protagonist to false hopes, only to frustrate and mock him. Thomas Hardy uses this device in his *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. In romantic irony, an author builds up the illusion of representing reality, only to shatter the illusion by revealing that the author, as artist, is the creator and arbitrary manipulator of the characters and their actions.

Ann Dobie submits that irony is a statement or situation in which the intended meaning is the opposite of what is literally said, done, or expected. She also identifies Socratic irony, dramatic irony and cosmic irony as

different kinds of irony. Richard Gill says that irony occurs when the reader sees a gap between words and the meanings those words have in the work. Irony takes a number of forms: there can be gaps between words and truth, between words and meaning, between intention and outcome, and between the interpretation a character gives of the world and what the world turns out to be like. Irony is always against a character. He or she is unable to see what is really happening. It can have a number of effects which may be bitter, comic, serious or tragic. All these concepts of irony are necessary for a better comprehension of the *Return of Ameze*.

The essay explores symbolism and irony in *The Return of Ameze* and arrives at the conclusion that ignorance, poverty and greed are the banes of the heroine, in particular, and the community, in general.

Symbolic Dimension

Felix Ogoanah employs symbolism and irony in his artistic manipulations of the plot and themes of the novel, *The Return of Ameze*. Ameze, the protagonist of the novel, is a symbol of purity. This is clearly discernible from the ways she lives her life in an environment that is soaked in immorality and abject poverty. Virtually every girl in Okoh embraces immorality as a means of survival because, to them, it is the easiest way of acquiring material wealth. Ameze refuses to follow suit; she remains puristic in her quests for survival. According to the novel, while other girls believe in prostitution, she believes that “education is much more important than sex” (64): no wonder then that Ameze finds her adaptation at Lady G’s Beauty Salon as an apprentice beautician very problematic. She complains bitterly to her mother, Maria, “The only things those girls talk about are boyfriends, sex, pregnancy, abortion and so on. I’m sick of the whole thing! ... Imagine a girl recounting, without shame, her sexual experience with whomever, the previous night, right in public... without shame!” (71). From the above extract, not only that Ameze does not cherish immoral life, she believes that indiscriminate sex is not what anybody will celebrate in public. The two exclamation marks in the above extract and the emphasis on “without shame” help to buttress our stand and to show how ridiculous and nauseating the whole thing is to Ameze. Her attitudes to the girls’ discussions earn her names such as “a green snake in the grass” and “a still water that runs deep” (71-2). Snake in this context symbolizes danger; anybody stung by a snake hardly survives it. It is even more dangerous when a snake shares the same

colour (green) as the grass camouflages such so that it is not easily identifiable by the unsuspecting victims. A “still water” also symbolizes danger. This is because its depth is not easily noticeable until the unsuspecting person plunges into it and gets drowned. But flowing water lays bare its depth and, therefore, is not as deceitful as a still water which conceals its depth. What the two names suggest is that Ameze also indulges in sex even more than any of them but tries to cover up hers under pretences. This accusation lacks evidence and, therefore, it is completely false. But how can she cope in this kind of environment? To be able to cope, her mother advises her to try to adapt because “you can hardly find a workplace in Okoh where people don’t talk about such things” (72). This is in agreement with Andrew’s remark that Okoh “is the home of commercial sex worker” (98). Ameze eventually leaves the Beauty Salon, not because of immoral discussions but because of her parents’ inability to pay the apprenticeship fee.

She secures a spot near her mother’s kiosk and sells roasted corns and plantains. This business gives her a lot of money with which she contributes immensely to both the family’s feeding and the father’s treatments. Though she suffers a lot, she prefers it to the loose life in Okoh because of her puristic nature. Her poverty notwithstanding, she refuses to succumb to any immoral monetary temptations. She holds her head high; and cherishes and protects her personal integrity in spite of all odds. It is on this background that she refuses to take the money Frank, her friend, offers her. She tells him: “I know you mean well. But I’m sorry, I can’t take it” (91). Frank is the only person she has truly loved in her life and she knows he is well disposed towards her but she does not want to break her principle even for Frank till the relationship gets to a mature stage. When financial pressures become unbearable, she resorts to carrying traders’ loads for money and then buying fresh fruits and vegetables to resell in the Central Market. She soon becomes engaged as a vendor and leaves off hawking. It is during this newspaper business that she comes in contact with Ehimen who immediately employs her to work with him in the office and then in the house with his wife, Nancy. Ameze has accepted the work because it pays more than the newspaper work and also removes her from the hazards of the road and the sun. She tries the best she can to make the couple happy with her excellent services. When her boss wants to convert her to his mistress, she quits the services and returns to her parents. Ameze has to sell “a beautiful skirt-suit” bought for her by her

uncle in Belgium. The buyer offers her three thousand naira which she hands over to her mother for her father's treatment. Ameze's dream has been to remain puristic till she marries Frank who will then help her to get a good education and enhance her status with which she hopes to drag her parents out of poverty and helps her to liberate Okoh girls from prostitution. Her belief in education is in accordance with Okpete Kanu's view that "... education is the key determinant of the level and quality of the contribution which any individual or group of individuals can make towards societal development. Education determines social status." (63) It is obvious from the above quotation that Ameze's view as regards education tallies with Kanu's stance and this is the type of view that brings about durable development in a society. But true development is not attainable in a situation where the majority swim in ignorance and as such reject constructive points of view. That is why Sylvester Oraifo says that "... the basis of true development is *thinking* – constructive thinking that is logical, objective and fans out into positive reflexive thinking. Every human being thinks but not everyone is able to have that imaginable thought that is creative and skewed towards good" (117). To the people of Okoh who are mostly ignorant and swim in abject poverty, education and constructive thinking are a waste of precious time: they want immediate solution to poverty, and prostitution offers it. So how long can Ameze resist immorality in this type of environment? It is, therefore, not surprising when Ameze's parents reject her marriage with Frank and chooses prostitution for her. In their rejection of marriage, Okoro, Ameze's father, says to his wife, Maria, "marriage is not what we need now. We can't be talking about marriage when every girl in the community is going out to earn money for her parents. Marriage could be a wasteful venture right now" (214). Two things stand out from his utterance: not only that Ameze's parents are greedy, they are also selfish people who do not carry the interests of their daughter at heart. Ameze therefore becomes a sacrificial lamb on the altars of greed, selfishness and poverty. Her case is a pathetic one. She bluntly refuses to go to Italy and, in her resistance, she tells her father, "I'm sorry Papa, I'm not going anywhere... I heard that people die there. If you don't like me anymore, just kill me here instead of sending me away to die" (206). The author has employed this extract to elicit sympathy for the heroine from the readers. This is also a weakness on the part of Ameze. Ogoanah's effort to present the protagonist as a model character tends to over idealize her. Why shouldn't she resist the travelling abroad violently to liberate herself from her parents' grips; after all Abdullahi Kadir

writes that “The violence of liberation is not violence for violence sake, but a physically and spiritually redeeming counter-violence” (117). Ameze lacks that power which Lloyd says is “the ability to control one’s destiny rather than have it determined by others” (11). It is not wisdom for her to leave her destiny in the hands of her parents. She lacks self-determination to fight for her well-being and to express it in a forceful way. This implies maintaining her dignity in the face of all odds that seek to destroy it.

Ameze’s non-resistant nature lands her in Italy where she is sexually violated and exposed to all sexual hazards against her wishes. She soon contracts AIDS which eventually leads to her demise. Ameze’s death symbolizes the end of purity in Okoh. The appearance of her ghost in their home is symbolic too. It symbolizes that her parents are the cause of her death. According to the novel, “Among the Okoh people, the dead never returned to the house they lived in or the home they built unless someone in that house had been responsible for their death” (6). Ameze’s appearance in their house after her death is a sure indication that the parents have a hand in her demise because they pushed her into prostitution which she had been subtly rejecting for long time.

Ameze is also a symbol of peace. Her full name is Amezerisiofo which literally means “the river water that never heats up or that never causes sweat” (11). This indicates that she never causes trouble to anybody. The name has followed her to her grave and I guess that in her next world, she will reject the name, “Amezerisiofo”, seeing what it had caused her in the previous world.

Mrs. Victoria Igbinovia (Madam Vee) is a symbol of immorality. This is evident from all her activities in the novel. She arranges girls to sleep with prominent politicians as part of the official protocol. According to the novel, “Omo was among the four ladies Madam Vee planned to lodge in a hotel that night, to await some big politicians” (34). She is a well known international business woman. Her sudden rise in wealth and social status is the outcome of an illicit business. She traffics in young ladies and she has “a very complex network of operations” (47). Her business of taking young ladies to Europe for prostitution has fetched her enormous wealth. Though she is based in Italy, she has connections in Holland, Germany, Spain and Saudi Arabia. She makes immediate cash from these transactions. She also trades in young boys whom she takes to other African countries for manual labour and

domestic servitude. During the cultural day celebration, Madam Vee organizes the amorous Makamba Group led by Omo and Osas. They scuttle to the stage “half-nude. In fact, they wore what could pass for mere pants that barely covered their buttocks, which they jerked in and out and twisted up, down and sideways in an amorous fashion. With every step they took, their breasts danced seductively beneath their scanty see-through blouses with spaghetti straps ...” (183). Madam Vee is instrumental to the nude rally organized by Okoh women and which aim is to protest against the repatriation of their children abroad (142). Her plan is to make the rally coincide with the cultural day celebration for maximum effects. All this is geared towards fostering her unlawful business. Madam Vee is ready to do anything humanly possible to safeguard her business. This is evident in her boasting to Nicholas Obazee: “But you have a lesson to learn from that [i.e. the nude rally]: Don’t you ever underestimate the power of a woman. Don’t!” (142). This is an indirect warning to Obazee to stand out of her way or face the consequences. We shall see later in this essay that this is not an empty boasting. It foreshadows Obazee’s assassination. When Ehimen intimates Madam Vee that Obazee’s “organization has been monitoring your activities. If nothing is done fast within the next few days, you may not be able to travel with those girls” (145). Madam Vee immediately liaises with her friend, Izigha, and both friends arrange Mr. Stone to assassinate Obazee. When Stone queries her on why Obazee must die, she lies: “He took my father’s land... And now he wants to ruin my business.” (150) Madam Vee is also afraid that if Obazee contests the senate with her brother, her brother will not have any chance at all because of Obazee’s popularity as a mouth piece of the masses. She fears that if he gets into any government position, her business is finished. So, for her illicit trade to continue, Obazee must be out of the way completely. She tries to use bribe to silence Obazee but he refuses to be bribed. Mr. Stone with his group eventually kills Obazee on his way home after the day’s work. Obazee’s death is symbolic: it symbolizes the end of justice. Madam Vee and Izigha are among the first people to go to the Obazees to express their condolences. This lays bare their hypocrisy and heartlessness. Even the name, ‘Stone’, is symbolic. It symbolizes a heart that is devoid of any milk of human nature – hard heartedness.

Now that Obazee is out of the way, Madam Vee visits Okoro and his wife and convinces the couple to send Ameze abroad. Before Ameze and her group leave for Italy, Vee takes all the girls to a native doctor beyond Ikpoba

Hill to take an oath and to undergo the final rituals. According to the novel, this oath is meant to keep the girls in check and to ensure that Vee's investment on them yields expected returns. The rituals involve "a few strands of pubic hair, nails, underwear, a few hairs from the armpit and, at least, a drop of blood, which the doctor took from their toes" (214) with the same razor. He rubs the mixture on their foreheads. The *dibia* (native doctor) and the trafficker keep the remaining for whatever reasons. These activities help to project to the fore the fetish nature and meanness of the human trafficker, and these are the girls she *helps* to locate their bearings. This is ironical. What are the repercussions of these rituals on these girls? The *helper* or sponsor does not care so far as she makes enough money on them. While in the place, all the girls cry bitterly. This foreshadows the sufferings and hardships they will encounter abroad. It also shows the inner workings of the girls: not only that the girls are afraid and apprehensive of what the future has in store for them and the effects of the rituals on their bodies if they do not keep to the agreed terms, it indicates lack of trust and confidence on their *helper*. The crying however symbolizes anxiety and suffering.

On getting to Italy, Vee sells Ameze and six other girls off for four hundred and twenty thousand dollars. The remaining girls line the streets every evening "in very scanty clothes" waiting for men to come and take them for prostitution. They have to do this for two years for Madam Vee before they gain their freedom to *work* for themselves. According to the novel, Ameze and the other six girls "were taken to a large multi-national settlement at the outskirts of the city, where each had accommodation and received numerous visitors each night. They were also involved in numerous pornographic and bestiality shows... The participants made lots of money, but they hardly ever survived the ordeal" (240).

Ameze has on two occasions tried to escape but the security is tight. Because of her refusal to co-operate, Alberto, the buyer, invites Vee to talk to her but her speech cannot make any impact. Vee "opened her hand bag and brought out a white handkerchief. She placed it over Ameze's face, as if to wipe off her sweat or tears... Ameze went off. Madam Vee rushed to the parlour and beckoned to Alberto" (242). In the presence of Madam Vee, Ameze is buck-naked and raped by three men. As if this is not enough, Vee shows her the video tape containing the whole show and threatens to kill her parents and sisters if she still refuses to cooperate. Vee's action portrays her as a symbol of immorality and everything objectionable. This is the woman the parents

believe helps them to alleviate poverty, hunger and by extension, develop their community. They do not know that Vee is only playing on their ignorance. Peter Odogbor submits that “unless individuals in a society respect their values and morals, development would be denied that society” (154). From this citation, it is glaringly that Madam Vee’s activities do not help Okoh People in any way positive, but rather help to destroy them. This is because prostitution does not respect the values and morals of any community. In support of Odogbor, G.O. Eneasator posits that “the national development of any given society... involves growth and progress that are made towards enhancing the quality of life of her citizens” (183). Can prostitution enhance the quality of life? No. The only thing that can enhance the quality of life of any community is education not prostitution or immorality as Vee advocates for Okoh girls. V. Aitufe writes that “education ... improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as child labour as well as bringing about empowerment” (50). And Manali Oak writes that it is education that brings about the desired change in the society and the development of a generation of virtuous individuals. M. Asupoto says that “Monetary empowerment is a function of education, knowledge, literacy and wealth. It is therefore not surprising that there is a great co-relation between tertiary education and wealth” (214). The problems of Okoh people are not only that they are mostly illiterates and ignorant, they are myopic. They want to solve their immediate problem which is hunger, but fail to see the long-term problems they create for themselves and the generations after them. They all look at the riches these prostitutes bring home but how many of the parents have taken time to study the lives of these prostitutes thereafter? This is the message the author wants to inculcate in his readers.

It is only Obazee that stands out to fight for the real liberation and development of Okoh People. He fights for the preservation of those aspects of the culture that promote moral values and foster the economic prosperity of the people. He operates the *New Vanguard* for Youth Empowerment (NVYE). The organization’s activities have often brought him into conflict with Madam Vee. Part of his work is to dissuade families from sending their children abroad for prostitution or for menial jobs. On a particular occasion, he has waded into Vee’s plans to send two of Pa. Ogiobo’s daughters to Spain for prostitution. Obazee warns Ogiobo thus: “Papa listen to me, ... You’re sending your children into danger. They will get you the money, but you will lose them in the long run” (135). This is paradoxical. How can he

get the money and then lose at the end? What this indicates is that these girls will send him money, but by the time they finally return home, they must have so much wasted their productivity that they can no longer produce children, if at all they come home alive. Vee is obsessed with her pursuits of money, but Obazee tells her that “The good life is not measured by the wealth we have amassed for ourselves. Where is dignity and honour...?” (143). He believes in young girls dressing properly and dancing decent musics that project the culture and not the *Makamba* type and the shabby dressings of the dancers. He hates Madam Vee’s business and he has on one occasion sued her but the case is struck on the ground of lack of evidence. But he becomes more determined to deal with human traffickers. He is not actually interested in dealing with Madam Vee as a person; he is obviously interested in liberating innocent children from being sold into slavery because of money. According to the novel, Vee has offered Obazee money to overlook her business, but Obazee tells her bluntly “sorry Madam ... what I want [is] leave those kids alone. That is my price. Leave them alone!” (186). The repetition of “leave ... alone” is for emphasis and it shows Obazee’s determination to maintain his stand. The exclamation at the end of the quotation shows how disgusting the whole idea is to the speaker. Madam Vee is desperate and nothing will make her stop the business. As I have hinted earlier, Obazee’s death symbolizes the end of justice and bravery. Obazee’s life is exactly the opposite of Vee’s life. The development he advocates, according to Odunbaku, J.B; is “a sustainable development which is bound to have a permanent and positive impact on a society not only in the present, but also in the future. All the ingredients of development in such a society must be sustainable since development in this respect has to be continuous and not static” (30). After all said and done, it is clearly discernible that Nicholas Obazee is a builder while Madam Vee is a destroyer.

In *The Return of Ameze*, police is a symbol of corruption. The life of Obazee would have been saved and the assassins apprehended if the group of police men the commuter had reported the incident to has taken prompt actions on the matter. They are not even surprised or bothered in any way. The day after the incident, the Public Relations Officer of the State Police Command vows over the television that “the police would unearth and smoke out the killers from their hideout. If the killers would listen attentively, they would hear our footsteps behind them” (191). The second sentence in the citation is only a sarcasm meant to sneer the public that expects the police to protect the

people. After visiting Mary at home, the police storm Obazee's office and query Sandra Obinna, Obazee's secretary, on the incident. Sandra hands over to them a tape recorder that clearly projects Madam Vee as the prime suspect of Obazee's death. But what will the corrupt and greedy police do with the document? They jump at it and use it to extort three million naira from Vee and allow the case to die away. Madam Vee and Izigha send robbers who eventually recover the money from the police "... in a few seconds, the money has gone back to its source" (204). This shows that our security is not guaranteed because a thief cannot catch a thief or they expose one another to the public. The police men and Madam Vee, by implication, are thieves of equal status; therefore, the corrupt policemen cannot take her money and get away freely.

Madam Vee has a contract to supply one hundred and twenty girls to two syndicate companies in Holland and Spain. Because the time given to her is short, she could not wait for the parents of these girls to raise the needed sum and so she empties her account to execute the contract. She has mortgaged her house to raise enough money for the trip. She soon discovers that it is not business as usual because the girls are apprehended at the airport. The banned substances Izigha had hidden in the girls' luggage are all uncovered. When the news gets to Madam Vee, she goes mad and in her madness she sees the ghosts of Nicholas and Ameze running after her life. This is retributive justice in progress. One does not always manoeuvre things and gets away unpunished. According to Barbara Godwin, it is good for a criminal to get her punishment so as to "protect society by segregating her; to deter her from committing the crime again; to reform her or to make an example of her which will deter others from similar crimes" (389). To most hardened criminals, punishment does not deter them because they return to their bad lives immediately their punishment is over. Madam Vee is a die-hard criminal and I prescribe that her madness persists for the rest of her life. However, it serves Madam Vee right, so that in future, she and her kind, according to Abdullahi Kadir, may realize that "inhumanity towards others may result in inhumanity towards oneself" (110).

Ironical Dimension

The author also employs irony in the development of his plot. It is ironical that Chief Okoro, though rich, cannot enjoy his wealth because the spirit of Ameze continues to dwell in the house. Since Okoro cannot imagine himself

and the family living with a dead person, they immediately pack out of their house not realizing that the spirit also moves along with them. The warning of Edionmwan Eboigbe has come to a fulfilment. He says, at the birth of Ameze, that “the part of destiny may seem absurd to the undiscerning; those who would attempt to twist the hand of fortune so that she derail may reap exactly the opposite of what nature had so benevolently designed for them” (12). The implication of the above citation is that Okoro, Maria and Vee have changed the better life God has designed for Ameze and now they are suffering it. Okoro is now a tenant in another person’s house, leaving his house behind, apparently for the spirit.

It is ironical that Okoro’s sister should condemn Ameze because she refuses to sleep with Ehimen, his boss, and therefore, fails to collect the money he offers her. Provided she gets the money to send her father for treatments, there is nothing wrong with sleeping with a man. She is even shocked that Ameze should behave so stupidly: “somebody puts sugar in your mouth and you throw it away. Do you think you can survive like this?” (121). This shows the degree of moral decay in Okoh. Under normal circumstances, Ameze deserves a pat on the back for her action, but the reverse is the case. To her aunt, prostitution is the only means of survival.

It is also ironical that Okoh women would even think of stripping themselves naked because of the rumour that “the government of the day was planning to repatriate their sons and daughters overseas, especially those in Italy, Spain and Holland” (129). If the government can actually do it, it is a good thing for Okoh people even though the women regard it as an abomination. To run the government down, they decide to carry-out the nude rally; not realizing that they are running themselves down. They fail to understand that repatriating the girls home is both in their own interests and interests of the girls concerned. They want the rally to coincide with the cultural day celebration so that they will bring so much shame on the government; they do not know that the rally would end up exposing their ignorance to the world; ignorance that their government has no power to repatriate the girls; ignorance that they do not know the repercussions of prostitution on their children; and ignorance that they have thrown their integrities to the dogs.

The author also employs the use of flashbacks, dreams, humour and proverbs to realize his artistic objectives. The dominant technique in the novel is flashback: the novel starts from the end and through flashbacks; the fore is

brought into focus. We first see the death of Ameze and then her birth, childhood days, her growing up, her struggles to survive, her love for Frank, her trip to Italy and the accompanying hardships, which precede her death.

Conclusion

This essay has been able to establish that the author employs symbolism and irony in his novel, *The Return of Ameze*. His application of symbolism and irony helps to project the themes – greed, poverty, and ignorance – to the fore. It also helps to sharpen the focus of the readers to the travails of the girl child. The essay has extensively recommended education as a fundamental solution to the problems of the people.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H. & G. G. Harpharm. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New York: Centage, 2012. Print.
- Aitupe, V. “Educational Challenges in Nigeria: Philosophical – Theological Perspective.” *Human and Religious Development in Nigeria*. Ed. Isiramen, C.O. Ibadan: Safmos, 2011. 48-60. Print.
- Asupoto, M. A. “Creating Wealth through Investment Least and Most Options.” *Women, Islam and Current Issues in Development*. Ed. Wole Abbas. Ile-Ife: Ife University Press, 2011. 214-237. Print.
- Ayinde, A. K. “Festus Iyayi’s *The Contracts* as a Replica of the Nigerian Society” *Journal of the Nigeria English Studies Association (JNESA)*, 14.2 (2011): 110-118. Print.
- Dobie, A. B. *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. New York: Lyn Uhi, 2012. Print.
- Eneasator, G. O. “Funding Educational Research in Nigeria for National Development.” *Perspective in Educational Research and National Development*. Ed. Ohuche, R.O. Onitsha: Summer, 1990. 182-188. Print.
- Gill, Richard. *Mastering English Literature*. New York: Palmgrave, 2006. Print.
- Godwin, Barbara. *Using Political Ideas*. Chichester: John Wiley, 1987. Print.

- Hub, Bright. "Reference Guide to Symbolism in Literature" 28 July, 2012. Web. 17 August, 2012.
- Jung, G.J. "Symbolism." Web. 17 August, 2012.
- Kanu, O.R. "A Historical Perspective on the Role of Women in the Management of Schools: The Challenges of the 21st Century." *Nigerian and African Education*. Awka: Meks, 1997. 63-79. Print.
- Lloyd, P.C. *Power and Independence: Urban Africa's Perception of Social Inequality*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan, 1974. Print.
- Manali, Oak. "Importance of Education." 1 Jan., 2011. Web. 7 may, 2011.
- Odogbo, Peter. "The Imperative of Music in Generating Right Attitudes Towards the Development of Culture and Good Governance in Nigeria." *EMOTAN: A Journal of the Arts*, 3 (2009): 150-158. . Print.
- Ogoanah, F.N. *The Return of Ameze*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 2007. Print.
- Oriaifo, S.O. "Science, Technology and the Arts in National Development." *Nigerian and African Education*. Ed. Anthony Ali. Awka: Meks, 1997. 109-221. Print.
- "What is Symbolism in Literature." *Wikipedia: the Free Encyclopedia*. 4 July, 2012.
- Willis, Bill. "Symbolism in Literature." Web. 17 August, 2012.