

## **EXPLORING ACHEBE'S STORYTELLING STYLE IN A LITERATURE CLASSROOM**

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### **Abstract**

Chinua Achebe, as an icon of African Literature, has distinguished himself as a teacher par excellence and enjoys world acclaim as “the bestselling author.... (and) among the most powerful and original writers in English fiction” (Publisher’s blurb). A simple answer to the ‘secret of fiction’ of his success as a master artist lies in his unique style of storytelling. This paper, therefore, explores two features of his style which pervade his entire fiction, namely, *jurisprudence* and *pedagogy*. The classroom teacher of *English Literature* or *Literature in English* will demonstrate his teacher competence by drawing attention of his learners to the stylistic devices used in a literary text and explains how they enhance literary corpus. The stylistic devices are consciously or unconsciously woven into a literary work to make thematic statements. The burden of this essay is poor communicative competence of Nigerian learners of English, the nation’s official language. Another problem is the learners’ poor reading culture, which results in poor storytelling. The paper is not unaware of other features of Achebe’s style, which he has harnessed to teach his infinite audience. It must be pointed out though that this essay does not say the final word on the features of Achebe’s

style for examination in this essay. The novels of Achebe that are used for this analysis are *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* while the paper adopts literary research.

**Keywords:** Style, Stylistic Features, Stylistics, Pedagogy, Socrates

### **Introduction: Background to the Study**

Nigerian learners use English in a second situation; the English language is the nation's official language and language of education. Some concerned scholars, whose mother tongue (MT) or L1 is not the English language, are agitated that their learners should be taught in their MT rather than in a colonial-bequeathed language; a language that does not reflect the experience of the learners or a language that does not enable them to express their innermost consciousness. At the moment, in view of the role the English language plays among the fifty-four member nations of the Commonwealth and in world politics and diplomacy as well as in information communications technology, among other things, we have no alternative than to embrace English and use it in classroom business, considering also the role the indigenized language plays in our national life.

Consequently, we study English as a Core Language subject in Nigeria's school curricula as well as Literature Studies. The Literature Studies we refer to in this essay are *English Literature* and *Literature in English*. English Literature, for clarity, refers to the genres of drama, prose (and) poetry (DPP) or play, prose, poetry (PPP) written by literary writers who use English as mother tongue (MT) or L1. Thus literary works of William Shakespeare, William Blake, Edgar Allan Poe, D. H. Lawrence, John Milton, George Eliot, Geoffrey Chaucer, Charles Taylor Coleridge, John Donne, Henry James, Emily Bronte, Jonathan Swift, Charles Dickens, Alexander Pope, etc. are English Literature.

On the converse, Literature in English applies to PPP written by African literary writers of Anglophone and those of Francophone and Lusophone (Portuguese), whose works are translated into English, born anywhere on the African continent, (in keeping with geography and race criteria) and whose subject matter is primarily African, among other criteria for adjudging African Literature, represent good examples of Literature in English. Therefore, literature works of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Efua Sutherland, Ama Ata Idoo, Chukwuemeka Ike,

Peter Abrahams, Joseph Karuki, Okot p'Bitek, Kofi Awonoor, Birago Diop, Oswald Mbuyisemi Mtshali, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Pope Agostinho Neto, Buchi Emecheta, Niyi Osundare, Kenneth Kaunda, Kamilus Chima Uka, Amos Tutola, Christopher Okigbo, Ngugi wa Thiong'O, etc., exemplify Literature in English.

We recommend English Literature to our learners so that they may learn firsthand the English language from the owners or L1 speakers of the language; those who have the intuitive competence of what we may refer to as the deep structure of the language; besides learning the culture of the lands that originate the literatures. Our learners study the structure of English by the MT speakers of English, besides acquisition of the cultural experiences and the local colour of those lands that nurture and originate those Literatures.

We also teach Nigerian learners Literature in English so that they learn their own cultural treasures documented in them. In the process, they read and learn how the borrowed script of the west may be used to express our own experience. Put differently, they learn the language habits and patterns of thought of the speech communities in which those literary works originate. Since language is culture-carrier, we transmit the appurtenance of the cultures of Africa. Africa has its values, which often are at variance with those of the west. For instance, it is certainly difficult for to convince an average African, especially an average Nigerian, to embrace gay marriage or be directly or indirectly enrolled with the lesbian/gay/transsexual/bisexual (LGTB) community. In the same spirit of culture espousal, it is also difficult, nearly impracticable, to make an average Nigerian man accept a marriage where the woman pays and marries him into her father's house, where he is expected to be completely under the woman with all it takes to be completely under her. The average African, especially Nigerian, would certainly not give in to any such anomie.

We read of elopement of lovebirds in the pages of English Literature of Shakespeare and other Western literary writers; such a practice is alien to the average African/Nigerian. This is why we expose our learners to both literary traditions. As we do this we draw their attention to the adage of *Okwa* bird, a wild fowl: "As you pick the yam of the farmer for food, you also pick roots of trees, so that in the event where the farmer harvests his yams, we depend on roots for survival."

In effect, the two literary traditions are important. Our learners study Literature in English in order to learn how they may use English to communicate their African thought; it is here that *domestication of English* comes in; what we mentioned earlier as language and habits of thought of our world view. It is impossible and unnecessary for us to speak or write English like those who use it as mother tongue. Chinua Achebe (1982) has proved this fact beyond all reasonable doubts; he says: “*Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing? is certainly yes. If on the other hand you ask: Can he ever learn it like a native speaker? I should say: I hope not. It is neither necessary nor desirable for him to be able to do so.*”

On the inescapable consequence of making the English language malleable, modifying it to align with our language habits and patterns of thought, what we described earlier as *domestication of English*, Achebe drives his point home:

The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. 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 an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience (61).<sup>1</sup>

It is on this note that we call for the codification of Nigerian English, (not necessarily lumping Nigerian English with West African English) as we have recognized varieties of English across the world of the Englishes.

### **Achebe, the Master Artist**

Achebe’s tremendous storytelling skill has earned him diverse names of encomium. Some scholars call him “*Omenka, the master Artist*” (Ernest Emenyonu, 2004: i)<sup>2</sup>; “*Isinka, Artistic Purpose*” (Ernest Emenyonu and

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<sup>1</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Morning yet on Creation Day...*

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Emenyonu, ed., *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe Vol. 1...*

Iniobong I. Uko, 2004: i).<sup>3</sup> The truth of fiction is the secret of his literary dexterity and the resilience of his narrative depth, which emanates from his ability to harness the oral literary tradition, orature, for short, of our preliterate society. African oral literature comprises our songs, legends, myths, tongue twisters, riddles, histories, etc. Ernest Emenyonu (1978) traces the scope of oral literature; on the scope of Igbo oral genre, he states:

“Igbo oral literature embodies the literary aspects of Igbo Oral Performances such as folksongs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, prayers including incantations, histories, legends, myths, drama, oratory (forensic and otherwise) festivals. From these grow the roots of Igbo life, its culture and its worldview (2).”<sup>4</sup>

The scope of Igbo oral genre is practically the same with other speech communities of every land and clime. As Emenyonu has done, Wole Soyinka also (2007: 226) traces cognate features of Traditional African literature, especially of the poetics of the Yoruba worldview. He itemizes aspects of oral literature often omitted:

Traditional African poetry is not merely those verses, which being easiest to translate, have found their way into anthologies and school texts; it is not merely lyrics which because they are favourites at Festivals of the Arts haunted by ethnologists with tape-recorders, supply the readiest source material for uprooted academics; nor is it restricted solely to the praises of yams and gods, invocations of blessings and evocations of the pristine.

Soyinka reveals other sources of Traditional African poetry which seem to be omitted. According to him:

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<sup>3</sup> Ernest Emenyonu and Iniobong I. Uko, eds., *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe Vol. 2...*

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Emenyonu, *The Rise of Igbo Novel...*

(Traditional poetry) however is also to be found in the very *technique* of riddles, in the pharmacology of healers, in the utterance of the possessed medium, in the enigmas of diviners, in the liturgy of divine and cultic Mysteries (in addition to the language of their public address systems), in the unique temper of world comprehension that permeates language for the truly immersed – from the Ifa priest to the haggler in the market, inspired perhaps by economic frustration!”<sup>5</sup>

It is this pool of our literary heritage that Achebe harnesses and embellishes to form the repertoire of his storytelling narratives as a teacher. The classroom teachers of Literature should inculcate this narrative skill in their learners in their Literature classroom. This is because storytelling is part and parcel of their culture; it is part of their learning experience. In order to reach their hearts and impart the knowledge of the subject, the teacher teaches his learners from known to unknown; simple to complex and from concrete to abstract. Thus, he needs to have knowledge of the subject matter and should as well have the right teaching methods and skills; above all, he must have communicative competence of the language of classroom instruction with which to highlight the styles of the literary writer. It is because of his dexterity as master storyteller using the Igbo oral narrative that Emenyonu (xvii) describes Achebe as “the most prominent Igbo writer.”

We probe to find out the problem which has motivated this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Literary appreciation is froth with subjectivity and impressionism. Linguistic or stylistic criticism carries out evaluation of a literary piece especially in prose or verse by inquiring after linguistic evidence available in a literary piece. Thus in stylistic analysis of a text, the stylist seeks to depart from subjectivity and impressionism that characterizes literary criticism and pursues objectivity. The problem, therefore, is that

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<sup>5</sup> Wole Soyinka, “Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Tradition”, *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*.....

students of linguistic criticism are ignorant of the features of linguistic evidence available in a text which they should look for while doing stylistic criticism. The essay will unveil facets of linguistic features that will enable both the student stylist and the teacher to recognize the realm of linguistic elements we find in a literary text while exploring the extent Achebe has exploited the linguistic features of *jurisprudence* and *pedagogy*, the most prominent linguistic styles that pervade his entire literary works.

### Research Questions

1. How best could we explain the concept of style?
2. What are the features of style?
3. What connection has style with stylistics?
4. What has pedagogy to do with style?
5. Why should 'Socrates' be relevant in the discourse of style?
6. What are the core linguistic features that make for objectivity in stylistic criticism?

### Style in Literature

On style, Nzebunachi Oji (2001: 201)<sup>6</sup> restates Schopenhauer, who asserts that it is the physiognomy of the mind. And in literature we best investigate the literary style of a writer.

Various features of style exist. Style, as a linguistic feature, is a bundle of complexes and an aggregate of textual patterns, patterns which are variables. Roger Fowler (1966:23) asserts:

Convergence of stylistic features could of course be said to be present in any utterance; it is, on itself, nothing special. At any point in a text there is stratification of form; patterns at several levels working simultaneously. The style of a text is the totality of these patterns, especially patterns which are variables, not constants. We can compare styles as the sums of several stylistic features, taking each in turn as an individual feature for comparison.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nzebunachi Oji, *Essay and Letter Writing...*

<sup>7</sup> Roger Fowler, *Essays on Style and Language...*

Style varies with individual writers, since no two writers write *exactly* alike. There are various indices by which we may analyze the style of a writer. M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham (2005:312) succinctly says of style:

**Style** has traditionally been defined as the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse--as *how* speakers or writers say whatever it is that they say. The style specific to a particular work or writer, or else distinctive of a type of writings, has been analyzed in such terms as the rhetorical situation and aim...; the characteristic *diction*, or choice of words; the type of sentence structure and *syntax*; and the density and kinds of *figurative language*.<sup>8</sup>

While we recognize the elusiveness, versatility and other definitive features of style, we appraise style in relation to an individual writer, for the purposes of this essay. As stated earlier, style domiciles in the realm of language. This fact may have informed Emeaba (1987: 197)<sup>9</sup> to declare that “style is to language what democracy is to politics.” And from this vista, he, among other things, perceives style as a “selection of the language habits (linguistic idiosyncrasies) of a person or writer which characterizes his uniqueness”. To this end, we want to ascertain what is particular about Achebe’s style that constitutes his uniqueness as a master storyteller.

Wynford Hicks (1999)<sup>10</sup> speculates that style differs from grammar in that style cannot be quantified and so has no precise rules. He adds that style is concerned not so much with the manners of language as the way the writer uses it to play on the sensations of the reader. Hicks stresses that style adds impact to writing, strengthens the contact with the reader and heightens his awareness. Poise must not be ruled out in style as it gives a literary piece balance, ease of manner and lack of strain.

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<sup>8</sup> M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*....

<sup>9</sup> Emeaba Onuma Emeaba, *A Dictionary of Literature*....

<sup>10</sup> Wynford Hicks, *English for Journalists*....



Since style is a “convergence of stylistic features”, as amply demonstrated by Fowler, Ngozi Anyachonkeya (2005: 6-121)<sup>11</sup> advances unique features of style which we are likely to find in a literary work, and on which we will base our investigation on Achebe’s style as a teacher. These features, according to Anyachonkeya, are: *the discursive style, the pedagogic style, the jurisprudence style, the cinematic style, the epistolary style, the legalese style, the mass communication style, the memoir style, the military style, the polemic style, the propaganda style and the reality style.*

Of these features of style enunciated, our study will be based on the jurisprudence style and the pedagogic style predominantly used by Achebe in his literary texts, using *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, hereafter, referred to as *TFA* and *NLAE*, respectively. However, incidental reference to some other styles of his may not be out of place, where expedient.

### **Linguistic Features Harnessed in Linguistic Criticism**

The core linguistic features, proffered by Ngozi Anyachonkeya which the stylist or linguistic critic looks for in a text to arrive at objectivity are as follows:

- (i) Cohesive elements
- (ii) Semiotic features
- (iii) Doctrines of (English) language usage
- (iv) Mythic features
- (v) Lexical and grammatical structures
- (vi) Semantics
- (vii) Language and habits of thought (255, 256).<sup>12</sup>

These linguistic features represent a bundle of complexes and aggregate of textual patterns, patterns which are variables, as aptly laid bare by Fowler, cited earlier, and which we watch and observe how a literary writer has skilfully used them in our search of the linguistic features in a literary text to achieve objectivity as against impressionism that characterizes literary criticism.

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<sup>11</sup> Ngozi Anyachonkeya, “Style and Linguistic Structures in Cuhkwemeka Ike’s Novels,”....

<sup>12</sup> Ngozi Anyachonkeya, “Core Linguistic Elements in Stylistic Criticism,”....

### **The Jurisprudence and Pedagogic Styles in *Things Fall Apart***

The jurisprudence style is also called the question or Socratic Method or style of teaching. Achebe, the novelist and teacher, has made salient use of these styles in *Things Fall Apart*. Questions call for response, either oral or mental. They help the audience or characters in a fictional work in sociolinguistic *experience* to enjoy a stimulating exchange of thoughts.

Through apt use of questions, Okagbue Uyanwa, a great diviner in Afa Oracle, and medicine-man, is able to persuade Ezinma to open up and point the exact point in the compound where she has buried her *iyi-uwa*. The Socratic dialogue goes this way:

‘Where did you bury your *iyi-uwa*?’ (Ezinma) asked in return.... ‘Where did you bury your *iyi-uwa*?’ ‘Where they bury children’, she replied, and the quiet spectators murmured to themselves.... ‘Where did you bury your *iyi-uwa*?’ asked Okagbuue when Ezinma finally stopped outside her father’s obi.... ‘It is near that orange tree’, Ezinma said. ‘Come and show me the exact spot’, he said quietly to Ezinma. ‘It is here’, said Ezinma, touching the ground with her finger. (*TFA*, Chapter Nine: pp. 58-60).<sup>13</sup>

The linguistic feature which the Igbo call *Ogbanje* is what the diviner wants to exorcize from Ezimma. It is a psychosocial reality in that it is metaphysical and cuts across cultures. For instance, Soyinka (28) calls it *Abku* in Yoruba culture and which he calls “Wanderer child.”<sup>14</sup> Chukwuemeka Ike (1973)<sup>15</sup> and Ngozi Anyachonkeya, all of the Igbo stock, call such a child as in Ezimma *Ogbanje*; J. P. Clark (1985)<sup>16</sup>, whose mother was a Yoruba calls him also *Abiku*. Ngozi Anyachonkeya (2006: 48)<sup>17</sup>; (2016: 8, 9)<sup>18</sup> in his play and poetics mentions the names the enigmatic child is called in other cultures. For instance, he says that the child is called *Changeling* in English; Yoruba, *Abiku*; Fulfude (among the Fulani), *Wabi*; Nyandang, *Risa*; the Mumuye, *Tori*; the Koma highland dwellers, *Jobi*; the Chmba, *Urum* all

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<sup>13</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*....

<sup>14</sup> Wole Soyinka, *Idanre and Other Poems*....

<sup>15</sup> Chukwuemeka, *The Porter’s Wheel*....

<sup>16</sup> J. P. Clark, in Donatus I. Nwoga, *West African Verse*....

<sup>17</sup> Ngozi Anyachonkeya, *A Grain of Rice*....

<sup>18</sup> Ngozi Anyachonkeya, *Ode for Ikemefuna*....

in Adamawa State of Nigeria; the Efik, Ibibio and Annang of Cross River and Akwa Ibom States of Nigeria call it *Okposanha* (48). So, *Ogbanje* is a linguistic and mythic component captured by Anyachonkeya, cited earlier, among his “Core linguistic features” a stylist investigates in his criticism of literary texts.

When Ezinma finally shows the exact spot, the medicine-man begins to dig up her *iyi-uwa*. When he digs it up and unties the dirty rag in which Ezinma’s *iyi-uwa* is wrapped, he goes back to jurisprudence style: ‘Is this yours?’ He asked Ezinma. ‘Yes,’ she replied...” (*TFA*, Chapter Nine: p. 61)

Achebe has also used the Socratic style as his searchlight beams on Okonkwo in Mbanta, his asylum town after committing female *ochu*. In this episode, Uchendu, Okonkwo’s maternal uncle, plies him with a number of confounding questions he is unable to answer. The following dialogue unveils Achebe’s jurisprudence style.

‘Why is Okonkwo with us today? This is not his clan. We are only his mother’s kinsmen. He does not belong here. He is an exile, condemned for seven years to live in a strange land.... But there is one question I would like to ask him. Can you tell me, Okonkwo, why it is that one of the commonest names we give our children is Nneka, or ‘Mother is Supreme?’.... ‘Why is that?’ There was silence. ‘I want Okonkwo to answer me,’ said Uchendu. ‘I do not know the answer,’ Okonkwo replied. ‘You do not know the answer?’ ‘So you see that you are a child. You have many wives and many children – more children than I have. You are a great man in your clan. But you are still a child, *my* child....’

Unable to answer those pointed questions, Uchendu, yet, plies Okonkwo with further viewpoint questions:

‘Why is it that when a woman dies she is taken home to be buried with her own kinsmen? She is not buried with her husband’s kinsmen? Why is that? Your mother was brought home to me and buried with my people. Why

was that?’ Okonkwo shook his head. He does not know either, said Uchendu, and yet he is full of sorrow because he has come to live in his motherland for a few years. He laughed a mirthless laughter, and turned to (Okonkwo’s) sons and daughters. ‘What about you? Can you answer my questions?’ They shook their heads (TFA, Chapter Nine: p. 96)

With those thought-provoking questions, Uchendu begins to reason with Okonkwo on the subject matter for which he has called him along with the members of his family and those of Uchendu. In this way, he carries everybody along the logic of his argument. Of course, Uchendu does not expect oral reply from Okonkwo, but he succeeds in getting his audience involved mentally, as though sharing in the dialogue.

Those questions provide a launch pad, as it were, in his pedagogy for Okonkwo and his large family; the elderly instruction justifies Achebe’s pedagogic style. Read and *hear* Uchendu:

‘Then listen to me,’ he said and cleared his throat. It’s true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother’s hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme. Is it right that you, Okonkwo, should bring your mother a heavy face and refuse to be comforted? Be careful or you may displease the dead....’ (TFA, Chapter Nine: pp. 96, 97).

Uchendu, no doubt, has helped Okonkwo to adjust his thinking, for he is heavily laden in grief. As Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society (2001: 239)<sup>19</sup> rightly points out: “When you know a person’s true

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<sup>19</sup> Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *Benefit from Theocratic Ministry School...*

feeling, this makes it possible for you or a teacher to be of the greatest help. Questions can also be used to add emphasis to thoughts...Questions that are carefully thought out are also powerful tools to expose wrong thinking....” In the excerpt, above, Achebe weaves in the polemic style into Uchendu’s pedagogic discourse.

Another remarkable episode, where Achebe has also used the Socratic and pedagogic styles in the novel, is on the contentious *osu* caste system. The converts to the new religion do not want *osu* people to be in their midst and worship the same God they also worship. But the new priest, Mr. Kiaga, forbids them. The persona, the mouthpiece of the converts, elects to speak for his fellow brethren:

‘You do not understand,’ said one of the converts. What will the heathen say of us when they hear that we receive *osu* into our midst? They will laugh.’ ‘Let them laugh’, said Mr. Kiaga. ‘God will laugh at them on the judgment day. Why do the nations rage and the peoples imagine a vain thing? He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision.’ ‘You do not understand’, the convert maintained. ‘You are our teacher, and you can teach us the things of the new faith. But this is a matter which we know.’ And he told him what an *osu* was.... (*TFA*, Chapter Eighteen: pp. 113,114).

The convert presents a powerful logic, while, in response, Mr. Kiaga also presents a powerful counter-logic. As a result, he has to announce his resolve: “Then I shall go back to the clan’.... And he went. (*TFA*, Chapter Eighteen: p. 114). Could we infer that the character and convert who later went back to the clan represents authorial voice? If you ask us, we will answer in the affirmative. Why? We will explain.

We will esteem more of Achebe’s adroit exploitation of jurisprudence and pedagogic styles which are woven into the other episodes when we harness reader-response critical tool to filter the thought process of the participant observers in the works of fiction. Commenting on the relevance of this critical analysis, K. M. Newton

(1997: 187)<sup>20</sup> quotes Hanns Robert Jauss (1978: 44-45, Section III), who: “believes that one of the most important justifications for literary study is that it allows one not only to perceive the fundamental difference between past and present but also partially to overcome that difference through being able to achieve direct contact with texts as human products even if they have emanated from strange and alien cultures.”

That has been the dilemma of Mr. Kiaga, who attempts to familiarize his converts with their culture they are born and bred in, and a culture that is alien to him. *How successful has he been? One may ask. Could the convert, who decides to go back to the clan, not authorial voice, we ask again? Is the persona, therefore, not advocating that the status quo remain?*

*Ogbanje* and *osu* are among the issues of myth discussed by Ngozi Anyachonkeya (2011: 107-117), where he subtly reveals the author’s covert approval to and in going back to the drawing board, as it were. Thus, we tread softly when it comes to mythic issues of our culture. Anyachonkeya avers:

Like – *akaraka*- predestination in the Igbo world view, myth cannot be erased from the psyche of a people, no matter their religious faith or profession of faith....A literary writer, through characterization, may not always be overt to make categorical statement on controversial or sensitive issues that touch or border on public morality. Adult characters in fiction at times withhold information; they tend to stammer to avoid telling a lie, for as the Igbo put it, if the elderly fellow fails to stammer, he will tell a lie! *O buru na okenye a sughi nsu, o kwuo okwu asi!* They may even achieve this by resorting to proverbial renditions or anecdotes (107-108).<sup>21</sup>

What has been crying on this subject matter continues to cry in yet another fiction of Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, the subject matter of

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<sup>20</sup> K. M. Newton, *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory...*

<sup>21</sup> Ngozi Anyachonkeya, “Let the Sleeping Dogs Lie....”

which encapsulates another question and pedagogic styles remarkably employed to unveil literary corpus. Let us find out.

### **The Socratic and Pedagogic Style in *No Longer at Ease***

A contentious issue demands serious and diplomatic handling. Achebe invokes the jurisprudence and pedagogic styles in approaching the mythic structures of *ogbanje* and *osu* in both novels of our study. The *ogbanje* myth has to do with Ezinma and her *iyi-uwa* in *TFA*. But the controversial mythic issue of *osu* begins in *Things Fall Apart* and extends to *No Longer at Ease*.

By means of these styles, Achebe carries his audience to a reasonable degree of involvement on the existential reality of the mythic thought of our ideological culture. To be or not to be, we do not know. He employs the reality style, the jurisprudence style, the pedagogic style and even polemics, among others, in examining the delicate issues of *osu*, *ogbanje*, *iyi-uwa*, all of which have challenged the diplomatic and doctrinal dogma of western religion on the African converts.

We recall that Nwoye leaves his father's house; his father places a curse on him, because he has joined an abominable gang -- *Christianity!* But has Nwoye jettisoned all the vestiges of the traditional religion of his forefathers in the process of becoming a member of the new religion described as a mad dog by Chielo, the priestess of Agbala deity, which has come to eat up the excrement of the clan? *Hardly!*

In the ensuing dialogue which has been garnished in Socratic and pedagogic styles as well as polemics, Isaac Nwoye Okonkwo withholds his assent to his son's determination to marry Clara Okeke, an *osu*. An elderly fellow does not stay at home and a goat gives birth on a rope. An elderly fellow who sees and fails to speak up is what kills him. In consonance to these Igbo proverbial dictums and platitudes, let us see whether Isaac actually *knew* his father in the ensuing dialogue between him and his only son on this knotty and contentious issue of our culture:

'You wrote to me some time ago about a girl you had seen. How does the matter stand now?' 'That is one reason why I came. I want us to go and meet her people and start negotiations. I have no money now, but at least we can begin to talk....' 'Yes,' said his father. 'That is the best way.' He thought a little and again said

yes it was the best way. Then a new thought seemed to occur to him. ‘Do we know who this girl is and where she comes from?’.... ‘What is her name?’ ‘She is the daughter of Okeke, a native of Mbaino.’ ‘Which Okeke? I know about three. One is a retired teacher, but it would not be that one.’ ‘That is the one’, said Obi. ‘Josiah Okeke?’ Obi said, yes, that was his name.... ‘You cannot marry the girl’, he said quite simply. ‘Eh?’ ‘I said you cannot marry the girl’. ‘But why, Father?’ ‘Why? I shall tell you why. But first tell me this. Did you find out or try to find out anything about this girl?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘What did you find out?’ ‘That they are *osu*.’ ‘You mean to tell me that you knew, and you ask me why?’ ‘I don’t think it matters. We are Christians....’ ‘We are Christians’, he said. ‘But that is no reason to marry an *osu*.’ ‘The Bible says in Christ there is no bond or free.’ ‘My son’, said Okonkwo, ‘I understand what you say. But this thing is deeper than you think.’ (NLAE, Chapter Fourteen: pp. 119-121).

The question dialogue leaves Obi Okonkwo aghast, agitated and devastated. He thinks aloud in a rhetorical outburst: “What is this *thing*? Our fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man *osu*, a thing given to idols, and thereafter he became an outcast, and his children, and his children’s children forever. But have we not seen the light of the Gospel? (NLAE, Chapter Fourteen: 121).”

Who said that our fathers *in their darkness and ignorance....?* *Are we or you wiser than our or your father? Would you wrestle with your father? Would you outrun your chi?* That would be outrageous. Obi Okonkwo’s emotional logic cannot make his father shift grounds. Instead, Isaac Okonkwo resorts to pedagogic style of dialogue:

‘I know Josiah Okeke very well....’ ‘I know him and I know his wife. He is a good man and a great Christian. But he is *osu*. Naaman, captain of the host of Syria, was a great man and honourable, he was also a mighty man of valour, but he was a leper’ .....’ *Osu* is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not to



bring the mark of shame and of leprosy into your family. If you do, your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generations will curse your memory. It is not myself I speak; my days are few. You will bring sorrow on your head and on the heads of your children. *Who will marry your daughters? Whose daughters will your sons marry?* Think of that my son. We are Christians, but we cannot marry our own daughters.' (Emphasis ours) (*NLAE*, Chapter Fourteen, p. 121).<sup>22</sup>

Obi's father has employed the jurisprudence and pedagogic styles. But his mother uses discursive style and eventually hands down her ultimatum to Obi in polemic style. She berates Obi as follows: "I have nothing to tell you in this matter except one thing. If you want to marry this girl, you must wait until I am no more. If God hears my prayers, you will not wait long'.... 'But if you do the thing while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head, because I shall kill myself'. She sank down completely exhausted. (*NLAE*, Chapter Fourteen: p. 123)."

Achebe, the master artist, has used the linguistic structures of jurisprudence, pedagogy and polemics to drive home the irrevocable stand of the conservative Igbo on the *osu* myth, a linguistic component. Could Achebe, through his persona, the authorial voice, be advocating that the status quo remain? Should you ask the essayist; he reasons along this line. Simply put, He thinks so!

Indeed, Ngozi Anyachonkeya (2006: 96-101)<sup>23</sup>, corroborates and adds that among the Igbo, and probably Africans, a young man does not just see a woman, and vice versa, and goes ahead unilaterally to formalize or consummate a marriage without the consent of his or her family. He insists that if any of them proves "stubborn" and marries without the approval of the family, (s)he would be treated as an outcast, or at least, ignored by the rest of the family in the event of trouble

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<sup>22</sup> Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*...

<sup>23</sup> Ngozi Anyachonkeya, *Omuma Heritage*...

erupting in the marriage. Anyachonkeya, also, notes that no parents generally would want their son or daughter to marry from a family that is of lower social status or ladder. He therefore warns:

We are not wiser than our parents or forefathers, especially when it comes to the *no go areas* in marriage contraction. Their environmentally imposed constrained denied them access to the white man's education. Thus, their "illiteracy" did not mean ignorance. They were highly enlightened, fecund in native intelligence and clairvoyance. They were custodians of traditional values of wisdom and higher knowledge. In the light of all these advantages to their credit, which probably informed their institutionalization of the *osu* caste system of social stratification, it has been a herculean task to dismantle all the vestiges of this highly controversial social structure of our modern time.

*Let the elderly not die, lest children see ada (a specie of beetle) and roast it in the fire for food, in the mistaken notion it was the (yam) beetle!* In view of the above, it is only when the Kingdom government preached by *Jesus Kristi* cometh that the "former things (will) have passed away." (*Revelation 21:4, NW*).<sup>24</sup> The mythic and metaphysical issue of *Ogbanje* is demonic and as such fueled by the wicked one and manslayer from the beginning of man. But for now, *nwa nne m, o meelee mee. Live! It's akaraka, a dighi a gwopu ya n'ogwu!*

Achebe has laid bare the immutable aspects of our myths. (*ogbanje* and *osu*). That should not be toyed with or swept under the carpet in the guise of western religious influence. Even Chukwuemeka Ike – in his *The Bottled Leopard*<sup>25</sup> - confesses why he has delved into the supernatural of our myths in his fiction. According to him: "It is an attempt to explore some of r traditional beliefs in the supernatural. Those beliefs which the white man and our western education made us sweep under the carpet but which continue to influence the lives of our people,

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<sup>24</sup> Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures...*

<sup>25</sup> Chukwuemeka Ike, *The Bottled Leopard...*

including PhD holders in the sciences (Beniah Oguzie, interview with Chukwuemeka Ike, 370).”<sup>26</sup>

As part of his sacred duties as a teacher, Achebe has documented these linguistic structures of myth in his novels for our instruction. It is not only the novelist, like Achebe, who teaches by means of his novels, but also the poet, and the dramatic poet or playwright; in other words, the literary writer, who writes in all genres.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Our study has proved beyond all reasonable doubts that Achebe is really a master artist and *Omenka*. He has used the stylistic devices of jurisprudence and pedagogy to some maximum advantage to convey his unique vision for the blind to see and the deaf to hear. The study has brought to the forecourt of the audience the linguistic components of cohesive elements, semiotic features, doctrines of (English) language usage, mythic features, lexical and grammatical structures, semantics and language and habits of thought as laid bare by Anyachonkeya.

As a matter of fact, the *Osu* and *Ogbanje* mythic issues are essentially semiotic as they are abstractions which domicile in our idiomatic and sociological cultures. They cannot be eroded by western religious influence, even though they are not entrenched in the sacred Scriptures of Christian religion. But the same Scriptures recognize the existence of fallen angels, who reside here with us. It is these fallen angels Christian Bible calls demons who fuel the beliefs and sustain them and make live in the minds of every man across cultures. Why? How do we know? The Devil (along with his fellow fallen angels), “has come down to (us), having great anger, knowing that he has a short period of time (*Revelation 12:12*).” It is only when they are removed from this realm that they will cease to exist, *when the former have passed away (Revelation 21: 4)*.

In view of the foregoing, Achebe, Soyinka, Clark, Ike, and even Anyachonkeya, document them in their literary creations for our consumption and for posterity as well as to immortalize our inherited legacies from our ancestors. We cannot wish those mythic issues away simply because they belong to African Traditional Religion (ATR). If we do, then it’s no longer necessary to follow due process in marriage

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<sup>26</sup> Beniaiah E. C. Oguzie, “Interview with Chukwuemeka Ike”....

consummation. We can then marry anyhow without the usual clandestine inquiries that go with marriage process. Yes, our forefathers dedicated an innocent man to a god and so his children and children's children remain outcast, only to be married by their kind.

However, *Osu* saga is watered down, one thing remains intriguing. It is the fact that we are ignorant of the type of gods our forebears dedicated such less fortunate ancestors of ours in the dim past to; we do not know the malevolent disposition of the gods and the degree of malevolent temper or aggressive nature and the ramification of repercussions they exact for violating their instrument of action. Of course, such malevolent deities we refer to as *Agwu*.

Thus to play safe, run as fast as your legs can carry you; he who heard with his ears should run away to safety, for he who stayed to see with his eyes will not live. It is let me stay and see everything that made the monkey to receive bullet wound on his face.

The conclusion of the matter, everything having been heard or read is: *Avoid all avoidable*, if we may reconstruct, reminiscence (in nostalgia) and sound Mbonu Ojike's *boycott all boy-cuttable* patriotic warning and maxim. The patriotic literary writers who documented these mythic and linguistic features have reasoned elderly, for if the elderly didn't stammer, he tells a lie. And if the elderly brave (man) coughs, the elderly spirit listens.

### **Conclusion**

Literature is creative use of language. Language, the most important asset human beings possess, since, as we have seen, is a powerful influence and the instrument through which people perceive their world view, their cosmology, what the Igbo call *Uwa Ndi Igbo*.

Through his styles, which are linguistic structures, Achebe has delved into the ideological and sociological realms of our culture to teach his audience, where we went wrong, and where the rain began to beat us as a people. He has proved beyond any iota of imagination that language is the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of culture, the sociological structure and material of our semiotics, not only culture-carrier, but the building blocks of our essence as well. What would we do without language, especially literature, language at work? *Nothing!*

This essay has not said all there is on Achebe's style as a teacher, the master artist. It has not exhausted the length and breadth of his

jurisprudence and pedagogic styles used in the twin novels, as it were. We, therefore, invite other scholars in linguistic criticism to do further investigation in this area of inquiry, so that knowledge and wisdom may flourish.

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