

THEMES AND STYLES IN NGOZI CHUMA- UDEH'S FORLORN FATE

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Abstract

Literary artists embellish their works with themes and styles to make them appealing to the readers. These themes and their manners of presentation most at times determine the acceptance of such works as great literary pieces worthy of continual reading and appreciation as they explore realistic happenings in a given society. So in this paper entitled "Themes and Styles in Ngozi Chuma- Udeh's Forlorn Fate" the scholars explore the importance of literary techniques as applied by the artist in her work for easy comprehension and appreciation of the work. Such techniques discuss aspects of oppression, prejudices, injustices, struggle for survival, crimes and many more themes to make her work unique and to address happenings in society. Ecocriticism is the theoretical anchor of the study as it exposes the relationship between man and the natural environment. It was discovered that the artist made use of various techniques which are very important tools in the study of any literary work. The data for the study is from two main sources, primary and secondary sources. The novel under study is the primary source, while library texts, journals, scholarly articles, the internet are the secondary sources. This study concludes that the importance of style and theme can never be overlooked in the study of any literary work of art.

Keywords: Theme, Style, Appreciation, Ecocriticism, Techniques

Introduction

Literature is a mirror that reflects the very society in which we live in, and over the years. Writers have used this medium to portray their various societies to the world. However,

literature does not just reflect the society, it tackles the issues in our societies as the impact on human lives. These issues are tackled through themes and presented in beautiful ways by the use of styles. The way a writer chooses to arrange his work or tell his stories is his own style. A literary work without themes and styles is like a pot of soup without salt and spices. In other words, without these two core features, a literary work would remain flat. In literary studies, theme is the central topic, subject or message within a narrative. Themes can be divided into two categories: a work's thematic concept is what readers "think the work is about" and its thematic statement being "what the work says about the subject". The most common contemporary understanding of theme is an idea or point that is central to a story, which can often be summed in a single word (for example, love, death, betrayal). A story may have several themes. Themes often explore historically common or cross-culturally recognisable ideas, such as ethical questions, and are usually implied rather than stated explicitly.

Literary style means the manner of expressing thought in language characteristics of an individual, period, school, or nation. Style is a broader concern, one that can describe "readers" relationships with texts, the grammatical choices writers make, the importance of adhering to norms in certain contexts and deviating from them in others, the expression of social identity, and the emotional effects of particular devices on audiences. Thus, style is a term that may refer at one and the same time, to singular aspects of individual's writing habits or a particular document and to aspects that go well-beyond the individual writer. Themes and Styles in literature are like two sides of a coin that cannot do without each other. It is a fact already established that literature is a reflection of the society that we live in, and its sole aim aside entertainment is to x-ray our society and reveal to us the good and the bad concerning the place we have found ourselves. However, this sole aim of literature to reflect our society will never be possible if there is nothing like theme. Authors make use of themes to discuss the happenings in our society and suggest solutions to them because every work of art is an answer to a societal question.

A lot of scholars and critics have written on style and theme, stressing its importance to literature. Aristotle, Cicero, Demetrius, and Quintilian in their book entitled *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics* treats style as "the proper adornment of thought" (35). In this view which prevailed throughout the Renaissance period, devices of style can be catalogued. The essayist or orator is expected to frame his ideas with the help of model sentences and prescribed kinds of "figures" suitable to his mode of discourse. Modern stylistics uses the tools of formal linguistic analysis coupled with the methods of literary criticism. Its goal is to try to isolate characteristic uses and functions of language and rhetoric rather than advance normative or perspective rules and patterns.

The term 'style' is used in linguistics to describe the choices which language makes available to a user, beyond the choices necessary for the simple expression of a meaning. Style has been defined or approached from many perspectives by different scholars and has various meanings based on what a writer wants to use it to achieve. Style and languages are interwoven. They cannot be separated. A writer differs from another writer either through the unique personal characteristics or language use to register expression of thoughts and emotions as well as tone. For instance, the writer Ifeoma Okoye is known and easily recognised through her expression of thought and calm tone of relating the ills in the society.

Leech and Short have described style as; “the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose” (30). This implies that, language can be used to achieve a specific purpose within a specific context to which it is being used by a writer or individual. Azubuike in the course *An Introduction to style* defines style as “a choice of alternative ways of expressing the same idea”. (15) There are different ways in which an idea can be expressed. No two words mean exactly the same thing. For instance; regular, frequently, always, often etc. A writer must make deliberate choices of linguistic patterns while writing. Leech in *Style in Fiction* opines that stylistic meaning is “that which a piece of language conveys about the social circumstance of its use” (47) Here, Leech adopts the theory of English style. Style in literature is defined as the way that a writer chooses to write. Style includes all the endless choices that a writer makes, using tools like word choice and sentence structure. All of these choices together create a 'voice' for a piece of writing. 'Voices' are as unique as the writers who create them and the stories they share.

Theme on the other hand has also received much attention from scholars and authors because theme is actually one of the most important features of literature. Without theme, a literary work is said to be totally useless and of no informative and educational value. Collem Griggs defines theme as: “the message conveyed by a text that applies to multiple other texts(5)”. From the above stated, one would gather that style and theme are very important when they reflect the society which is the major work of literature. Themes discuss the happenings in our society, offer solutions to them while style presents it to us in a manner most suiting to the author.

The theoretical framework for this study is eco-criticism. Eco-criticism is the study of representations of nature in literary works and of the relationship between literature and the environment. As a separate movement or school of literary criticism, ecocriticism started developing in the 1990s. There is a close relation between ecocriticism and literature. It is an interdisciplinary study of Ecology and Literary Criticism which is unusual as a combination of a natural science and a humanistic discipline. By analogy, ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and environment or how man's relationships with his physical environment are reflected in literature.

According to Uhl Christopher in his work, *Developing Ecological Consciousness*,

The word eco-criticism is a semi neologism and eco is the short form of ecology, which is concerned with the relationships between living organisms in their natural environment as well as their relationships with that environment. The term Eco-criticism has a broad domain and has been expressed through many literary genres. Eco-criticism is not only the application of ecology and ecological principles but also the study of literature and theoretical approach to the interrelations of nature culture and sometimes even supernatural elements in nature. It attempts to explore the expressions of environment in literary texts and theoretical discourse (32).

In many literary works in English, nature has been a prime issue. The transformation in the social and cultural environments of the world has completely changed the relationship of man's attitude towards nature in literary expressions. Trees have been cut down to make ways in the forest: bushes have been burnt to create wider roads for explorations of several mineral resources and animals have been slaughtered in thousands to meet the increasing demand for meat and skin hide markets. The ozone layer is under continual threat and will face greater threats as the world continues to pillage nature for her monumental growth and industrialization.

From another angle, Asika views eco-criticism as a literary theory that strives to preserve and protect nature for the sole benefit of man. He however stressed that nature should be treated with care and respect, because any act of negligence towards nature will spell doom for man and other natural elements. In line with the above views, Asika in an article "That We May Be Saved" states that:

Eco-criticism takes its concern in the fact that man is part of the natural existence and those actions against nature invariably are actions against humanity and well-being of man. It tends to mediate between man and nature as a means of providing more conducive, comfortable and habitable environment for man in his world. Nature plays an integral role in the lives of human beings and negligence to this fact calls for a serious concern. (18)

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This relationship has been reflected through writers and poets throughout

different cultures across the world. A variety of novels, poems and other expressions of literature been depicted on the backdrop of issues concerning nature. Today, environments issues have become a matter of concern for many departments and disciplines of knowledge and development. It is an interesting study for a literary critic to study the texts of writers who have discussed the close relationship between man and nature (52).

Eco-criticism as a rapidly expanding area of research covers a wider range of texts and theories which study the relationship between man and nature. This study, it is argued, cannot be performed without a keen understanding of the environmental crises of modern times and thus, must inform personal and political actions; it is, in a sense, a form of activism. So using ecocritical approach, the study hopes to investigate the perception of the Nigerian natural environment with close textual attention to Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Forlorn Fate*.

Themes and Styles in Ngozi Chuma- Udeh's *Forlorn Fate* **Exploitation**

The people of Odu were very peaceful community before Geologist Murray located their community and discovered oil beneath their soil. The people of Odu become a representation of the Niger Delta people of Nigeria who have continuously faced the wrath of oil exploration in their region; each community in the Niger Delta region all woke up one morning to witness their fields taken over by black pudding and their rivers flowing poisonous oil that killed their fishes and turned their hopes and dreams into nothingness. This is a settlement of people who all through their lives have lived from the products of their environment, they fish, they farm and they hunt for their daily meals and one morning someone comes out of the blues and destroys everything they have held there, everything they have cherished. The implication of this is that Niger Delta region which produce almost thirty percent of the Nation's wealth live in total and abject poverty, they feed from hand to mouth and their children do not go to school because of their sources of income destroyed by the government which is meant to protect them. The sad story of the Niger Delta region becomes the main theme of the novel *Forlorn Fate*, because just like the other Nigerian authors, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh decided to address the issues of the oil exploration going on in the Niger Delta regions. She tells us how peaceful Odu was till oil exploration started in their region and Odu is just like every other Niger Delta Community.

Through the story of Dickson Sotonye, the writer tells us the fate of the average Niger Delta male child who grew up believing that the Whiteman is the one who is responsible for their future and all they have to do is to give in their life and watch him milk it dry and he will bless them with scholarships and provide for them but when he discovered that the whiteman is actually playing with them and using them, they resort to fighting, to militancy and self-defence because they want to defend their lands from hunger, starvation and ceaseless murder. From the narration of his exploits in the novel, Timi

Sotonye was a great warrior indeed as he fought with the captors that came for him. First we were told that "... he descended on the nearest person he could lay his hand on and tore him down with his bare hands" (159). This account though may be exaggerated as he tore the mouth of the man apart and the jaws rip with a sickening resonance, but then it is an act of heroic deed. Theme of Exploitation is the main theme of the novel *Forlorn Fate* because it was not only the land of Odua that was exploited, the people of Odua were also continuously exploited, killed and raped just because they have oil in their land.

Militancy

Another dominant theme in the novel *Forlorn Fate* is the theme of militancy and military invention. The Niger Delta region is known for the activities of Militant groups. However, the Nigerian media does not report anything good about these people they only tell us that the group is deadly, dangerous and a threat to the smooth implementation of government policies. The novelist takes it upon herself to correct these misconceptions about the militants of Niger Delta and answer the questions of "why", why did they become militants. The youths of Odua in *Forlorn Fate* were deceived into carrying arms by the foreign Geologist, Mr Murray. According to Skeleton, Dickson Sotonye, he uses them to do all kinds of dirty jobs like kidnap and even murder and he promised then that they will be sent to school and be given scholarships so we see that the youths of Niger Delta do not even take to militancy out of their own wills, they were deceived into it and they are merely being used. It's just like a case of when someone comes into our land, destroys your means of livelihood and then turns you into a criminal to defend him while making you promises of gold and diamond.

These people are human too and they are most vulnerable to deceit and manipulation based on the kind of environment they have found themselves, that is what the novelist has captured in her novel, *Forlorn Fate*. For instance, Dickson Sotonye (Cobra) while being interrogated by Nina, the Colonel sent by the US Army to Africa for the rescue mission of Bois Senior, captured this hopelessness in the following rhetoric thrown at her;

...What do you know about the Niger- Delta? What do you know about my people? You say I have my whole life before me. It sounds quite sweet in your mouth... such great words! However, I ask of you Madam, what type of life do I have before me? A despondent life riddled with forlorn fate? There is no life in the Niger Delta. I have no life... we have no life to live... (80-81)

In the above speech, Nina noted was delivered with perfect English and in a refined manner. With shock, she realized she was dealing with a "graduate militant" and by the end of their encounter in the interrogation room, Cobra succeeded in getting Nina on his side to the chagrin and anger of the other members of her rescue team.

Slavery

At the start of the novel, we were meant to understand that the people of Odua do not want to ever associate with the whiteman and we wonder why, why do they hate the Whiteman. The novelist tells us why. The people of Odua years ago lived in peace and harmony until the mad prince from the lineage of the Timipres decided to make a pact with the white men. He started waging war with the villages around Odua so he could capture their people and sell them into slavery and when he could no longer get slaves from neighbouring communities he started selling his own people and even made a plot to sell his childhood friend, Timi Sotonye to the whiteman in slavery, a plan that worked out but not without first seeing that the Amanyanabo reduced to a vegetable state. Timi Sotonye was taken on a voyage to the whiteman's land to become a slave on landing in Europe and through him, the author tells us the horrible experiences these slaves went through. He had to witness a group of tired boys killed by being pushed to the ocean, he had to witness his people die of hunger and starvation, and he had to witness people being killed recklessly by their captors and worse of it, he witnessed a pregnant woman at the point of birth being held in shackles and chains. The priest could not contain his emotions and sometimes he cried out to the goddess of the River whom he worshipped asking "Olokun are you seeing all these" (225). Slavery and slave trade took a lift from the shores of Africa, an able bodied men and pretty women. In her own vision of slavery, Timi Sotonye made sure he passed his culture on to the next generation before joining his ancestors and that was what led Nina to her root in Africa

Styles in Ngozi Chuma Udeh's *Forlorn Fate*

Stylistic devices are basically techniques and tools used by writers to convey meaning and create aesthetic effects within a text which makes it more effective, interesting and approachable. Thus, writers often use language artfully as a means of expressing feelings, thought, ideas, as well as adding beauty and clarity to a literary piece. In other words, stylistic devices enhance emotional, aesthetic and intellectual appeal of a given text. Certainly, a writer who organises his ideas in a unique and appealing way increases the richness and beauty of his literary work. Ngozi Chuma Udeh employed different stylistic devices in *Forlorn Fate* to provide a deep representation of meaning and ideas which clearly revealed the underlying message she intends to convey. The following stylistic devices are identified as used in *Forlorn Fate*.

Imagery: The primary function of imagery in Literature is to bring a lifelike quality to scenery, characters, or circumstances. Writers use imagery to give life to their words in a way that is both realistic and authentic. This enables them to evoke certain feelings and images in the minds of the readers and outlook of reality. When Odua community witnessed the first ever seismic explosion that occurred in their land, the writer says of the once peaceful environment, thus; "At the Odua Riverside, the fragrance of water lilies, daises and reeds merged with fresh scent of the river, the fertile soil along the river bank prop up glorious colonies of reeds, rushes and sedges that spread with the natural rhizomes ease" (3). The novelist gave a vivid, realistic picture of the appearances of

some characters in the novel. She uses descriptive language to create mental images of characters in the reader's mind.

Flashback: Flashback is a stylistic technique in which a writer interrupts the chronological sequence of events to reflect upon experiences, events or incidents that had earlier occurred in the past. However, writers use flashback as a means of adding background information in the present event of the story. This provides the reader with information about a character's past, secrets, inner/external conflicts and significant events that have affected or shaped life. In other words, by employing flashback, writers allow the reader to get an insight into a character's motive and actions which usually deepen the intensity of the plot and provide a better understanding of the present action. Flashbacks are often introduced in narratives with the help of various methods ranging from series of dreams, memories, sudden remembrance or past stories told by the character. The novelist carefully uses this technique to full effect to make sure that the readers understand the history of the Odua Community from generations past and when the story is being told, it was more like history repeating itself as she succinctly puts it thus;

That morning, Odua Kingdom woke up to the gory sight of the dismembered forms of the young Chief Priest's amiable wife and infant son lying in the midst of scores of men. It was apparent that a great war was fought on the threshold of the priest of Olokun but who attackers were and why they came was not readily ascertained because the chief priest of Olokun and his remaining household could not be found (168)

The novelist is telling the story of what happened in generations past, the story of where the rain started beating the people of Odua Kingdom. With flashback, the author is able to make the readers understand that the Odua community has always been a very peaceful one till the whiteman crossed their borders and lured their young prince into slavery. The young prince, possessed with power and greed started selling his kinsmen into slavery after killing his father to crown himself king. Through flashback, we came to the realisation that the families of the priests and that of the Timipres were actually very close in the past till Teye, the young prince became possessed with greed and wanted to kill Timi, he did not succeed though but his attacks rendered Timi weak which made it possible that he was captured and sent into slavery. That was how the lineage of the Sotonye's started in America, away from the shores of Africa, from the great Timi. The writer employs flashback quite skilfully to detail Odua's past and background.

Foreshadowing in the Novel: Foreshadowing is a literary device used by writers to hint about future events in the story. It is generally used to give insights of future events within the confinement of a given narrative. By presaging about an event that will happen later in the story, the writer allows the reader to predict how the event would turn out; this carries the reader along and makes the narrative more arousing. There are several instances of foreshadowing in Chuma Udeh's *Forlorn Fate*. The writer presaged doom and death in the land of Odua, through the death of Birinyo, she foretells of more death in the land of Odua. Birinyo was the first, but according to the writer's words, he

was not going to be the last the writer foreshadows: “fourteen year OldBirinyo became one of the very first victims of oil exploration in Odua ancient Kingdom of the Niger Delta” (9). However, while the first instance of foreshadowing predicted doom, the following instances of foreshadowing gives the reader some optimism that ultimately things would turn out well.

Narrative Techniques: Narrative techniques are methods writers use in narrating their stories. In *Forlorn Fate*, Chuma Udeh uses different techniques to achieve effective narration. The writer adopts the third person point of view, in which she narrates events using the third person pronoun “He”, “They” and “it”. This gave her the ample opportunity to air his views with her through a character or in a philosophical reflective form. Some examples of third person narration in the novel are as follows: “Nina shook her head vigorously; too many things happening at the same time are threatening to throw her off balance. No... She would not allow that. She was a combatant officer”(87). The third person point of view was employed here to tell us how Nina felt and even tell us her thoughts at a particular moment, we were able to know how she felt and what she was thinking because the reader chose to tell us about her characters from a “God” perspective which is the all knowing narrator.

Language Use: Literary language refers to the use of language defined mainly by its figurative meaning which ultimately conveys ideas from imaginary points of views. Literarily, writers often use language to effect the desired expression which is achieved only when words are carefully combined in both clear and concise manners. Thus, literary language relies costly on imaginary and figurative descriptions by means of which writers can artistically express ideas. Therefore, the hallmark of effective expression in literature is in the stylistic manifestation of literary language. Hence. Language use in *Forlorn Fate* manifested to a great extent elements of literary language such as the use of imagery, figurative expressions as well as descriptive language so as to realise the desirable artistic effect in the text.

Conclusion

This study centered on the themes and styles of Ngozi Chuma-Udeh *Forlorn Fate*. The novelist tried to x-ray and buttress themes and styles in language use as the arrangement of words in a way that best expresses one's thoughts. From the novel, we can conclude that the spirit, which propelled the literature of post-independence in Africa, is indeed the spirit of disillusionment, anger, oppression and hopelessness. Theme and Style analysis which this research focuses on is the end product of a mode of analysis of literary texts. The role of the literary analyst is to bring out the theme and style that is the literary features used by a novelist to interpret his works. In Chuma-Udeh's *Forlorn Fate* the socio-political instability and disillusionment in the society and its attendants consequences were explored as these concerns our modern society. The socio-political instability of the environment in *Forlorn Fate* appears not to be the only cause of persistent conflicts between the youths in Odua kingdom, the Federal Government

and the foreign oil corporations. The author exposed the real life socio-political realities that obviously gave rise to the issues in the novel.

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