
Leadership Question and the Writer's Style: A Literary Stylistic Analysis of Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You By Chance*

Isonguyo Akpan

Department of English Akwa Ibom State University Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT: This paper interrogates some artistic positions taken by Adaobi Nwaubani in projecting leadership issues in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. The paper notes that in spite of the enormity of critical attention on leadership in African critical space, bulk of the critical materials center around the ineptitude of African leaders and its consequent underdevelopment of African societies and the suffering of the mass. Literary critics hardly pay attention to those artistic positions through which authors project leadership issues in their texts. It is against this backdrop that this paper is dedicated for interrogation of some aspects of literary techniques, through which Nwaubani addresses leadership issues in her text. The work reveals how the author uses characterization and setting to expose the corrupt nature of most political leaders in Nigeria, their gluttony, and the deteriorating nature of some public institution. It has also revealed the complicit roles played by former colonial masters, and world institutions in entrenching criminality in Africa, especially in the Nigerian leadership. The paper concludes that both contents and form are very critical in understanding a literary work and so, an analysis of one at the expense of the other may scuttle the totality of the import of the issues authors raise in their texts.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, Literary stylistic, Analysis, Nwaubani

INTRODUCTION

Every writer has a unique pattern of expressing his thoughts or ideas on every aspect of human affairs. This distinctiveness in the expression of thoughts or conveying a message by the literary artist is what is considered as his literary style. The style of a writer brings to bare his ideological point of view, and also leads the reader to his stance on a particular issue. Style, therefore, becomes the soul of the embedded meanings in a literary piece. According to Saleh Abdulmughni, "style is the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse. It is how a speaker or writer says whatever he says"(422). The style of an individual author or writer, thus, sums up his or her perception or certain ideology. This aligns with Nigar Valiyeva who opines that "...the style of a writer is so closely connected with the content of his soul, that the experienced eye can see the soul through his style, and by studying the form penetrates to the depth of the content" (34). This explication on style could be closely associated with Buffon's common definition of style as the man.

Niyi Osundare in his *Cautious Paths through the Bramble: A Critical Classification of Style Theories and Concepts* posits that "A writer's style may be regarded as an individual and creative utilisation of the resources of language which his period, his chosen dialect, his genre and his purpose within it offer him" (16). This implies that the uniqueness of the work of a writer largely depends on how he has successfully flouted the established rules of language and imposed his choices and idiosyncrasies on it. "For every language has within its system a loophole, an elastic edge for the adventurous user to widen and stretch" (Osundare, 17). It also implies that every individual has his peculiar ways(s) of doing things. The style of any writer is analysed on the basis of the modes of his vocabulary, his pattern of words, his figurative language and the personal involvement of his emotions and attitude. It is choosing a right word at the right time at right place.

Thus, style is the term used to capture this inherent human phenomenon, which is also applicable to one's distinctive mode of expression, both orally and in writing. The style of a writer (also known as 'idiolect') is, thus, his unique way or pattern of communicating his views, feelings or messages. Babajide observes that a person's style is informed and shaped by the aggregate of his social and political background, religious inclination, cultural values, experience, educational attainment, geographical location, and exposure (125). Thus, according to Christiana Kinrim, Mamenoka Awodi and Daniel Abuh, "it is crystal clear that language is not only a means of communication; it is also critical for literary creativity and production" (2). Todorov corroborates the above authors when he echoes that literature has language as both its point of departure and its destination; language furnishes literature its abstract configuration (96). In other words, the writer has, in the process of adopting a particular style, liberated and expanded the frontiers of his style and language itself. This position correlates Chiegeonu Ndudim's comment on the devices of literary

Leadership Question and the Writer's Style: A Literary Stylistic Analysis of Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You By Chance*

creation. According to him, "One of the basic differences between imaginative literature and other forms of expressions in print is the language and the way words are patterned or created to draw our attention to the experiences writers present" (37). Here he simply identifies some narrative techniques like imagery, metaphors, symbolisms etc. as literary devices that could be used by a writer to present his literary works.

Literary stylistics brings out the hidden meanings embedded in the structures or forms of creative works. An understanding of literal or surface meaning of stories without taking cognizance of the techniques or style used by authors to present their narratives results in a distorted comprehension of the entire piece of writing. Many critical studies have been conducted with the aim of appreciating the text, and also critically analyze the text to unravel hidden meanings and social relevance. For instance, Camerla Garritano examines Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* with aim of interrogating the inter-plurality and connections of discourses in the text, and in the popular texts in selected African movies. However, the literary devices and style used by the author have not been clearly examined.

There is need to identify and analyze the stylistic features in the novel, and how they facilitate the understanding of the underpinned meanings constructed by the novelist. Thus, this paper will attempt to prove how literary style can construct meanings in literary works. It will also examine how figurative language constitutes the cornerstone of the literariness or ornamental nature of literary language, as it enables the writer to exploit and manipulate the latent potential of language, in sundry ways, for specific stylistic effects.

Synopsis of *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*

The novel begins with a prologue narrating the meeting, love affairs, and the marriage of the parents of Kingsley, the central character in the play. Divided into two parts, the first segment chronicles the hardship that befalls Kingsley's family. His parents have not been able to make enough money to comfortably cater for the essential needs of the family. Kingsley's parents are graduates with Master's degree from the UK. His father, an Engineer who works in the Ministry of Works and Transportation does not earn enough money to provide the basic needs of life for his family. His mother, a graduate of Clothing and Textile from University of Nigeria, Nsuka. Upon returning to Nigeria with her husband, she cannot get a job. So, she opens a fashion shop where she makes dresses for her customers. Kingsley's father later becomes very sick that the little money made from the fashion business is what runs the home, while the stipends earned by him is sunk into the purchase of his medicine and other medical treatments.

Kingsley's family values education so much that his father regards every uneducated person as a lost soul or a miserable human, whose life amounts to nothing. His father gives him a serious piece of advice when it is discovered that he plays football with other boys. This advice changes Kingsley's life, as he becomes very serious, and makes very good grades in the University. As a graduate of Chemical Engineering, Kingsley is very hopeful that he would get a better job in Oil Company. He has written many applications, and attended various interviews which he passes very well. However, he is rejected by several oil companies, even after passing the interview examinations. His only crime is that he does not bribe in order to get the job, neither does he know someone who knows someone that can connect him with Managing Directors. He feels so desperate and hopeless, as he cannot carry out his responsibilities as the *opara*, the first son of the family. Ola, his girlfriend in the university, abandons him because she feels their relationship would not amount to anything meaningful since he cannot get a job like his mates. The first section of the novel ends with the death of Kingsley's father.

The second part details Kingsley's business and work with his Uncle Boniface, also known as Cash Daddy. Kingsley first meets Cash Daddy for financial assistance when his father is very sick. He ends up working for Cash Daddy who is a rich and popular advanced internet fraudster. Kingsley is able to make a lot of money, take care of his siblings and mother, and even get a visa to travel to the US. He can comfortably take care of his family. But his mother is not very happy about the source of his money. She has told him not take her to the Specialist Hospital in Port Harcourt for her optical operation. This is because, she feels that Kingsley is robbing white people of their money through internet fraud.

In the epilogue, Kingsley opens his personal business with the name KINGS VENTURES INTERNATIONAL. He has a well-furnished café with internet and computer for the comfort of the users and customers. There are warnings against the use of the facility for any form of internet fraud business because anyone caught would be handed to the EFCC, and then the police. Augustina, Kingsley's mother is very happy with him, noting that he has always had taste for good things, just like his father.

Narrative Techniques in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*

Tricia Nwaubani is one of the newest voices echoing from the Nigerian literary space, and like her contemporaries, she graphically describes the world around her and the experiences of her fractured society (Okpiliya and Akpan, 5). *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* is her debut novel. In this novel, Nwaubani employs plethora of techniques to expand the frontiers of her message. The novel is divided into two interdependent divisions. Part one of the novel chronicles the realities that push the protagonist, Kingsley Ibe, into a life of crime and scam. Part two is actually where the story begins. Here the author takes the reader into the world of email scam known in Nigeria as Advanced Fee Fraud. This technique allows the readers know why the protagonist has come to the decision to join the 419 empire of his Uncle Boniface.

Leadership Question and the Writer's Style: A Literary Stylistic Analysis of Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You By Chance*

The novel begins with a prologue and concludes with an epilogue. A prologue could be understood as a sort of introduction to a story which usually sets the tone for the story and also serve as a kind of antecedent to later events of the story. Epilogue on the other hand is a literary device that acts as afterword, once the plot of the story is exhausted. In this novel, the prologue chronicles the background of Kingsley's mother's lonely and uncelebrated childhood, her meeting with his father, the eventual marriage of both of them and their journey to United Kingdom for postgraduate studies. When they later appear in the main story, Kingsley's father, the once handsome young man, is now old, poor and a retired civil servant while his mother, now also old, owns a tailoring shop where she merely patches torn cloths. Nwaubani uses this technique not only to lay a background to the main story but to show how academic efforts is insignificant in the achievement of success in Nigeria. In the Epilogue, Nwaubani winds up the story with Kingsley now a changed man, taking a responsible job that pleases the heart of his mother. She pays him a visit and shows her acceptance of new, seemingly legitimate status. Nwaubani uses this to say a little bit about the life of the protagonist after the story itself is wrapped up.

Nwaubani infuses this story with humour in a very warmth language. This technique acts as a comic relief that allows the reader shake off momentarily from the apprehensions and anxieties that characterise the world of email scam. It is also an element of satire; a technique employed by literary writers to expose and ridicule the foolishness of an individual or the society. The reader cannot help but laugh at these hilarious expressions: "... surrounded on one side by aunts, each of whom aspired to a higher standard of obesity than the previous one, and on the other, by Cash Daddy who could probably talk a spider into weaving silk socks for him" (136). Obesity, as used in this context, is a consequence of greed and gluttony. Nwaubani uses this to ridicule some greedy leaders who have looted so much of public fund, and become obese that one can hardly differentiate their neck from the head. Kufre Akpan describes this as a "... destabilising agent in the postcolonial African polity" (32). The character of Cash Daddy is disgusting but also laced with humour especially when he devours a meal with his hands, quoting the scriptures or moderating a meeting while defecating. Through the character of Cash Daddy, Nwaubani ridicules the leaders as frivolous and people who have completely lost their sense of decorum.

Moreover, there is a symbol of elephants in the novel. Elephants are large mammals with 60-70 years life span. Elephantiasis is an infection of the parasite that causes extreme swelling of the legs or arms. Thus, when Kingsley describes Cash Daddy and his friends: "World Bank" and "Pound Sterling" as suffering from "the elephantiasis of the pocket" (220), he is talking about their financial worth. The leaders have looted the treasury so much that their bank accounts have swollen like one suffering from elephantiasis. The use of international financial institution and denominations, World Bank and Pounds Sterling, as characters in the novel is a means of exposing the fact that the leadership crisis in the country, to some extent, persist because of the continued flirtation with Europe by the Nigerian leadership. It is very disheartening that the World Bank is still detecting Nigeria's economic plans and policies, and most of these policies are actually working against the growth of the nation's economy.

Victims of the email scam are referred to as "Mugus" in this novel. Mugu is a Nigerian pidgin which is translated as "big fool". It is commonly used within the context of Advance fee fraud known in Nigeria as 419. In the novel, characters like Mirabell, Edgar Hooverson and Condoleezza are all described as "Mugus" because in their greed and desperation to recoup much money from a faceless contract, they become fools and get sucked by Cash Daddy, and his cohorts through gleefully crafted emails. Cash Daddy and his cohorts represent Nigerian leadership, and the followers are the "Mugus". Like typical scammers, they swindle the populace with unrealizable promises, and get what they want. During electioneering campaigns, many aspiring leaders promise paradise on earth, only to disappear into the thin air when they are helped to the position. Like Cash Daddy with his numerous Mugus, the leaders defraud the followers by making them mortgaged their rights, which is even worse than financial fraud.

Nwaubani also uses story within the story in the novel. As stated earlier in this research, this technique is used to lay a stage for the main story. Since the story is always related to the present story, it enhances fuller comprehension of the story the author is narrating at the present time. For example, Kingsley, to confirm a crack in his relationship with Ola, draws a parallel between the attitude of Ola's mother at her restaurant and the nonchalant attitude and unusual coldness with which Ola received him when he visited her in her hostel. The reader knows this through Kingsley's story of what transpired during the visit.

Nwaubani also uses these beautiful expressions to register her disapproval of leadership in Nigeria. Examples of such expressions are: "He stepped out of the shower and yanked a large towel to start drying his body. Once again I wondered how the scrawny urchin, who live with my family all those years ago, had metamorphosed into this fleshy edifice...I half expected his bloated belly to wriggle free of his body and start break-dancing on the tiled floor in front of me" (120). Words like "fleshy edifice" and "bloated belly" create an image of greed, gluttony and corruption which are common trademarks of the Nigerian leadership.

In addition, the author adopts a recognizable setting, and this does not only enhance the effectiveness of the story, but also authenticate the setting. Some of the places and institutions mentioned are real and in existence. For examples, Umuahia, Abia State University, Uturu, Faulks Road, Aba, among others are used not only to establish the closeness between the reader and the events of the story, but to enhance the verisimilitude of the story.

Furthermore, Nwaubani develops her characters in a way that projects leadership failure in the text. The examination of these characters leaves no one in doubt that the reader is encountering a typical Nigerian situation. One of these characters is Uncle

Leadership Question and the Writer's Style: A Literary Stylistic Analysis of Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You By Chance*

Boniface, also known as Cash Daddy. He is Kingsley's uncle and lives with Kingsley's parents in his teenage age. He later drops out of school and runs a very big 419 empire. Maddened by his stupendous wealth, Cash Daddy bribes the Chieftains of his Party and obtain nomination to run for the governorship position in Abia State. Amidst a much-tensed electioneering campaign, Cash Daddy is poisoned to death. Through the portrayal of Cash Daddy, Nwaubani sees Nigerian leadership as a scam, and Nigerian political space as one big 419 empire. This is because the leaders for once have not fulfilled to their followers, those obligations of leadership. Or how can one explain why the persistent poverty, hunger and unemployment in the midst of abundant natural resources? Cash Daddy's easy sail to political prominence is a serious indictment on the country's political system. The fact that the polity is suffering is because people of questionable antecedents, fraudsters and scammers are allowed to man various leadership positions in the country, and no meaningful leadership can emerge from these species of human beings parading themselves as leaders.

Another character is Kingsley Ibe, the narrator through which the story is narrated. He is a young graduate of Chemical Engineering obsessed with working in a oil company. He attends several interviews and performs very well, but since he does not know the one that gives the job or know the one who knows the one that gives the job, his efforts always amount to nothing. As the first son, he has the responsibilities of taking care of his aged parents, sponsor his siblings in school, and marry Olamma, his love. So, caught between these burdensome responsibilities, joblessness, and meeting up his culturally assigned gender roles in the family. Monica Udoette and Kufre Akpan opine that gender roles are "socially constructed because the delineation of social roles and the way the sexes- male and female are conceived, attract different levels of distinction" (56). This is why Kingsley becomes restless as he cannot afford the responsibilities of the *opara* owing to unemployment. Luckily, an opportunity beckons and he throws in the towel and becomes not only rich, but the number two man in his Uncle's scam empire.

It becomes pathetic that a society where one's education and academic brilliance does not guarantee a job is a society that is ill, and needs medication. The scenario is a sad indices of an ailing society. It is a mark of ineptitude and failure on the part of the leadership that one has to know the one who gives the job before one can get it. Where then lies the hope of the common people? Nwaubani's commitment in addressing the above development informs James Okpiliya and Kufre Akpan's argument that: "...no writer has ever written in isolation. His inspiration is always sharpened by the drive to expose and bring to the fore all the contradictions and apprehensions that engulf his society" (52). Thus, the writer's immediate environment becomes the primary source of his critical thought and creative writing.

Professor Buchi is another character that needs an evaluation. He is in charge of admission in Abia State University. He takes bribe from Kingsley and influences the admission of his sister, Charity, even when she does not merit it. Kingsley confesses here: "Then I told him how I was willing to pay and he agreed to see "what I can do". Three weeks later, Charity's admission letter to the Department of Philosophy was ready, complete with Deputy Vice-Chancellor's signature" (214). This is a serious indictment on the Nigerian university system and its leaders. As an academic, his role is to ensure sanity in the system, but Professor Buchi condescends to the level of taking bribe to give admission. Through this, Nwaubani seems to say that leadership crisis in Nigeria is contagious, and has touched all sectors of the economy, including the educational institutions.

Kingsley's father is also another character that could be used in analysing how visionless and tactless Nigerian leadership is. He is very intelligent, and a holder of Master's degree in Geography and Regional Planning from an unnamed university overseas. He worked and retires as a civil servant from the ministry of Lands and Housing. He is noted for his uprightness during his days in service, but dies as a poor man because he would rather starve to death than pocket any bribe. Kingsley's father's condition shows that the reward system in the country is flawed. Honest people are never rewarded but criminals and rogues are rather celebrated. This can only happen in a society where education is downplayed, and materialism emphasised.

Nwaubani also adopts epistolary form in narrating this story. For example, the title of this novel is derived from the first sentence of the letter Kingsley sends to one of his Mugas. I DO NOT COME TO YOU BY CHANCE, UPON MY QUEST FOR A TRUSTED RELIABLE FOREIGN BUSINESSMAN... (147). Kingsley's series of rejection by all the oil companies he has attended interviews are conveyed through the letter. It is also through Emails that Cash Daddy and his cohorts swindle the people of their hard-earned savings. Nwaubani uses this technique as effective means of drawing the attention of leadership to their foibles.

Nwaubani also uses first person point of view in narrating the story, but sometimes she introduces the omniscient point of view. Thus, Nwaubani's uncertainty in maintaining the first-person point of view is a reflection of the flawed leadership in the country. Through her stylistic choices, Nwaubani equates Nigerian leadership space as a 419 empire. This is because, there is no actual difference between scammers and Nigerian leaders. While 419ners defraud people of their earnings, Nigerian leaders defraud the people by giving them false hopes and promises and, even make them mortgage their rights, which is even worse than financial fraud.

CONCLUSION

This paper attempted a literary stylistic analysis of Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. The evaluation of the author's usages of characters, setting, narrative techniques, and humor in the novel reveal a corpus of leadership crises which are ravaging

Leadership Question and the Writer's Style: A Literary Stylistic Analysis of Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You By Chance*

the world systems. The assessment of the style in the text opens up the window for a critical interrogation our society, and a better understanding of the text. A particular attention is given to the Nigerian leadership context where anomalies have been normalized. The author subtly argues that unemployment is the basis for the involvement of young and smart Nigerian graduates in internet fraud. The portrayal of the character of Cash Daddy reflects government's accomplice role in entrenching fraud, and other criminal acts in the Nigerian society as political leaders become ever greedy. They feast on the public treasury, and become obese as one infected with elephantiasis.

The author's use of names like World Bank and Sterling Pounds in association with criminal characters exposes the corrupt nature of the world monetary institution, and how Europe has aided corruption in most of her former colonized states like Nigeria. Nwaubani's use of setting makes specific statement about the leadership of Nigeria, and her institutions. Equally, the switches between the first person and third person narrative techniques is critical of the nature leadership in Nigeria: a confused one.

Therefore, the writer's style has facilitated deeper understanding of the novel beyond the periphery of the narrative or story itself. Hence, it is concluded that literary form and content are very vital in the critical analysis of a text because the analysis of one dimension without a specific strong ground results in a haphazard, distorted, and shallow understanding of, and conclusion on the text. Thus, a literary stylistic analysis provides critical tools for the unmasking of the ideological underpinnings in a text, and a comprehensive understanding of the message therein.

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