

APPROPRIATENESS AS A STYLE IN A SELECTED IGBO POEM

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the appropriateness of the language of ‘Agarachaa’ a selected poem from Okediadi’s (2003) *Ije Uwa*. Appropriateness of a language in literary studies gives a value judgment of the suitability of language used in the discourse. The specific objective of this paper, therefore is to find out the effectiveness or otherwise of language in the selected poem laying special emphasis on the form, theme, image, allusion and diction. In doing these the study adopted a descriptive approach. The research work found out that the form of the poem stands the acceptable format of writing poem, hence it is written in stanzas albeit, three unequal stanzas. The study also found out that the theme x-rays the level of promiscuity among married women. In addition, the image and allusion aptly synchronize, with the picture and action that emerged in the scene. The poetic device is so technologically chosen that it described the picture painted in the poem in a clear language.

INTRODUCTION

Appropriateness cuts across all disciplines, though it appears that the literary studies have much more need for it. Appropriateness according to Scott. (1965), means what is appropriate to behaviour, propriety of conduct or particular usage required by politeness or decency. The Sanskrit equivalent of appropriateness is generally understood by Sanskrit writers as the harmonious adaptation of poetic means (words, sentence, figures, and images) to the poetic end, which by general consensus is conceived as the evocation of aesthetic delight “ (Chari, 1967).

Certain styles, characters, forms and actions in literary works are deemed suitable to one another within a hierarchical model of culture bound by class distinctions through appropriateness (Horace, 1995:82). Also Gideon (2007:93). Appropriateness as “a central rhetorical principle requiring one’s words and subject matter be aptly fit to each other, to the circumstances and occasion, the audience and the speaker”.

The thrust of this paper is to x-ray the style, appropriateness and the use of decorum in a selected written poem “Agarachaa”. A critical appraisal of the use of style, its appropriateness and the use of decorum in the poem show that the poet applied a lot of poetic devices that enhanced the beauty of the poem. However, in a bid to effectively do this, the poet dwelt more on certain themes and activities that are artificial to the Igbo cultural setting. This clearly shows that in a bid to adhere to the dictates of set by western literature, the poet forgot the setting of the poem which is African in nature.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of appropriateness is crucial to literary works as it raises fundamental questions with regard to the language of poetry and poetic semantics, criteria for the judgment of literature and even questions involving the philosophy of language. It is linked with the concept of beauty which is dependent on order and fitness, thus every context in our lives demands for accepted and appropriate patterns of treatment. There are expected behaviors for married men and women. A widow is expected to dress in accordance with the tradition of the society within the period of mourning. An educated is looked upon to have elites as his associates. It is appropriate for a man breaking Kola nut in a marriage ceremony to pray for love, peace, unity, understanding, and happy married life, while it is incongruity for such person to pray for divorce or death under this context.

Appropriateness simply emphasizes the need for congruity of poetic language with time, spatial setting and purpose. Any language applied at a wrong time, place or purpose usually fails in its appropriateness despite how impressive the language might tend to be. Certain behaviours are expected of adults. Classes of people in terms of age and status are expected to talk, discuss and address people in a manner that benefit their age and status.

For example, in a place of drama, a child is bound to speak and act like a child while a king is bound to speak and act with the authority of a king. If however, for instance, a child speaks like an adult, dramatic appropriateness is violated unless the child had earlier been projected as an extraordinary child and who has a special role to play towards the attainment of the theme and objective of the play. And so, for appropriateness to be achieved in some literary genres, there should be harmony adaptation of characters to their roles. In case of poetry, for instance, appropriateness demands that it should be written in verse, not in prose; or dialogue. If any poetic piece is written in prose or dialogue, it automatically ceases to be poetry. This does not, however, suggest that whatever is written in verse automatically passes for a good poetry.

Even when a poet observes the universal format of writing poetry (putting what is writing in appropriate stanzas and the inclusion of poetry devices) propriety may not yet be guaranteed until certain other conditions are fulfilled. Such other conditions that are required by a piece of poetry are:- The harmonious link amongst the theme of message, language or diction, allusions and images, and the society the poem is supposed to mirror upon. In other words, the symbols, images allusion and diction chosen by the poet must be relevant and environment is bound to derive its imagery, symbols, allusions, and even diction from the peculiar features of the environment for judge as appropriateness. If for instance a poet decides to misappropriate features in riverine areas to write a poem meant for people in the desert zone, his image and allusions could hardly be appropriate, except perhaps the poet is trying to make a comparison between the two geographical zones.

The need for congruity between symbolism in poetry and geographical location is observed by Murphy., (1972), when he opines that: Naturally, a poet take his symbols from the world around his land, so some of the symbols used in English poetry may be strange and foreign to non-Europeans and to people studying English literature who are living in tropical countries. These

symbols and other images that the poet use, will not, of course, have the same impact as they have on people who are familiar.

A look at this poem written by Bernard entitled '*Dry your Tears, African*' explains this further. According to Izuchukwu (2005:238) the consoles in the first stanza thus:

Dry your tears, Africa!
Out of the storm and quails of fruits journeys

Izuchukwu states that the first stanza encourages Africa to take heart because her children have all return from their "*fruitless journey*" the poet points the woes that have bedeviled the African countries. It is thus ironical that Africa should rejoice even though these people return empty handed. This is because they have only acquired western education but with no practical proof of it. They have not come back with the knowledge to develop Africa as they cannot engage in manufacturing. So, their journey is indeed fruitless and this poem is appropriate in the African context where people who studied outside the country cannot engage meaningful development of their continent. Izuchukwu (2005), also presents a lot of poetic devices used by the poet to beautify his work. The language according to Ikegwu (2000), is rich and dense and sometimes full of images.

Cussons (2006) looked at Eco-criticism, language and demystification of trauma in Izuka's *The travail of the Black Gold and Okpewho's tales*. Here the focus is the environmental hazards perpetuated by oil exploration in Niger Delta. In the words of Cussons (2006:94): Environmental hazards are gradually seeping into literature and popular culture. Its causes, effects and the role of literature in cubing it will form the basic of this work....these two authors have written extensively on the travails of the Niger Delta regions. Continuing, Cussons observes that Izuka, in *The travail of the Black Gold* explores the kind of suffering the people of Niger Delta region pass through. These sufferings are such that has eaten quite deep into the life style of the people. The people have thus taken their fate the way they see it.

Okpewho (2003) raised some pertinent questions in his work. While commenting on the last page of his novel, he asks:

“where does one stand in context between personal interest and public welfare, between ethnic goals and the national agenda; between regional environmental degradation and national economic interest, between professional ethnics and state security?”

The study looking at all these problems raised in the novel concludes that the issue of Niger Delta question is a critical one. This is because there is an ethical dimension to the Niger Delta question. The dimension of wrong and right, good and evil, justice and injustice, according to Cussons (2004) formed the pivot of the new literary trend to criticism. It should be stated here that appropriate style, and creatively were applied to ensure that the stories being told come out vividly.

In fact, impact of appropriateness on literature generally is so enormous that the compartmentalization of literature into the three broad genres of prose, drama and poetry on content and form is ipso facto dictated by the subtle influence of appropriateness.

APPROPRIATENESS IN IGBO WRITTEN POETRY

Igbo written poetry in the context of this study is used to mean the type of Igbo poems written in the style of European Romance language where an inspired poet thinks and writes a poem about an object or situation that impinges on his emotions. Thus, rather than looking at the Igbo society, their culture and oral tradition, they follow the “European tradition” of writing poems.

For proper delimitation, the study will not concern itself with the traditional or oral fixed type of poetry which often lacks identifiable authorship (except perhaps now that some of them are recorded in print) and which is transmitted orally, such as the types collected in Ogbalu (1974, and 1985). The study will also not concern itself with the fluid or flexible type of poetry that is orally composed in performance such as the type recorded and published in Uzochukwu (1985). These two types of oral poetry, which we will not be concerned with are those common to both literate and non- literate Igbo, but more by the later and semi-literate.

However, the Igbo written poetry, the type we will solely be concerned with tends to be an exclusive prerogative of literate Igbo, at least for now. The writer of this poem is educated Igbo who has studied the poems of the Roman literature at different levels, and taking a cue from these literature write poems in the Igbo language. In their modeling, the poets strive hard to observe as much as possible the theoretical norms that characterize the poetry of this romance/literature cum language.

For example, they try to observe the appropriateness of verification, theme, rhyme, rhythm and other poetic elements and devices which literary critics hinge their aesthetic judgment upon. They also try to create relevant symbols, imagery, and allusions which are foreign to Igbo people’s tradition as well as borrow cultural values, from these western cultures. Collection of some of these Igbo written poems are found in a few Igbo anthologies now in print. Some of them are found in Emenanjo (1975), Ekechukwu (ed) (1979), Okediadi (2003), Obienyem (2000) among others.

The pertinent question, therefore, is “how appropriate are some of these written Igbo poem?” To be able to draw conclusions, we are to make a simple and brief analysis of one of the written poems to ascertain how the poet has manipulated appropriateness or otherwise in relation to his chosen theme and setting.

THE POEM “AGARACHAA”

Agarachaa is a poem written by Okediadi (2003) which is on pages 19 and 20 of *Ije Uwa* (Akwukwu Abụ).

Thesaurus of ‘Agarachaa’

‘Agarachaa’ is a satiric poem that describes the life of a typical African woman in a social setting. The poem is likely to have derived its theme from the conviction by people that most modern African women are not committed to their marital lives and that most of them are not only self-wild and promiscuous but ensnared with ephemeral things of the world, for instance ‘Agarachaa’ lives partially in the home where she is supposed to participate fully as a house wife and a mother and partially outside her matrimonial home where she is treated with “Good things” outside her home. Thus lines 1 to 3 of first stanza which reads thus:

Uhuruchi eruola! (evening has come).
Olee ebe ugbo ga-ebuga m? (where will motor carry me to?)
Q bu n’ulo ka q bu n’ezi (is it home or outside?)

This clearly puts that she stays partly at home and partly outside the home with her lovers. Following this promiscuous life of hers, she finds it difficult to concentrate on her family. She saw her duties as a mother in a home as burden and an uphill task rather than an interesting activities hence she lives her children and husband to the mercy of her house help (maid) as seen in lines 5 and 6 of stanza 1.

Nwaneku ga-eletara m di m na umu m anya.
(Babyseater will look after my husband and children).

Line 4 of stanza 2 buttresses the Africa man possession over their belongings including their wives.

O kwari mmadu nwe ogodo ewu na-ata
(I presume/suppose the cloth being eaten by goat belongs to some body?)

The evil effects of waywardness also seen in lines 7, 9 and 10 of same stanza.

Q chupuru nwaanyi ozq na di... and (lines x 10)
(She chased away another woman from her husband’s house)
Q nyepuru Nwoke ozq afq ma aguu...
(She feeds other man but starves her husband).

Line 9 stanza 1 suggests that even when Agarachaa would finally settle down at home that she would still find it difficult because she is already being enticed by the fantasy and romance of her amorous activities outside her home. She occupies herself all the day with rumination of how she wined and dined at present claiming that tomorrow will think for itself (line 9-10). Her ambivalent life style made her body to be torn apart.

olee ebe ugbo ga-ebuga m?
(where will motor take me to)

Q bu n'ulọ ka q bu n'ezi?
(is it in the house or outside)

In lines 2 and 3, she thereby created wide gap between her and her family. She fails to take care of her household and as such relinquishes her position as a wife to her house help (maid).

Mgbe Agarachaa ga-alọta ulọ
(when Agarachaa will return home)
Mgbe ahụ ihe emebiela.
(By then, it has become late).
Nwaneku aburula Nwunyedi.
(House help has become a co- wife)

The Africa man could not wait for his wayward wife hence he turn their house girl into house wife (Stanza 3 lines 1-3). Being that every action has its consequence; her metaphorical flirts landed her to the lost of her womb and contracted deadly disease (Stanza 3 line 4. and 5). Although, she later became non exuberant and sensitive to her promiscuous life, it was already late for an adage has it that there is no repentance in grave, hence, Agarachaa reaped what she sow by responding to the punishment of sin which is death (stanza 3 lines 6-8).

Appropriateness in the poem 'Agarachaa'

Following the techniques in the analysis of the genre visà-vis the theme, setting, image and allusion, language and diction. Does 'Agarachaa' as a poem stands the test of appropriateness as a style?. To determine this, the above techniques are discussed in turn to ascertain their effectiveness in the poem.

Form

Form is the highest common factor in genetic distention. The poem "Agarachaa" stands the test of the general format of a poem. It is written in stanzas and verses. It is unique and cannot be confused to be a narrative prose or drama. Stanzas one and two have ten lines each, while stanza three has eight lines "Agarachaa" maintains reasonable rhythmical beatings and can therefore be said to have satisfied the principles of appropriateness as a poem in terms of form.

Theme

Theme is deciphering and author's message in a particular piece of writing in to normal language which could be in verse or verbal form of the piece. A clear picture of moral deterioration and effectual behaviours among some married women in particular and general laxity to the demands of duty by the synchronous women are bountifully depicted.

Setting

The poem is set in a normal home environment Also such action of "Agaracha" abounds in normal, home environment Also such action of the piece pass the test of appropriateness as a poem in terms of setting.

Image and Allusion

A lot of images and allusions were made use to rightfully justify the end of the poem, such images and allusion were depicted from several expressions in the poem. For instance, “*Uhuruchi eruola!*” (evening has come) (line 1. stanza 1) clearly points out that Agarachaa fully knows that what she was doing is an abomination for a married woman otherwise, she wouldn’t have waited for night fall before going out for her harlotry. Again “*gaa Kporie ndu, Echi bja.... a ga-ama...* (if tomorrow comes/we will know what to do) (stanza one lines 9 and 10) clearly brought out her gluttony “*Akpa nwa emebisiala*” (womb has spoilt) (stanza three line 4) depicts the gravity of her atrocities while “*Qrja e si n’elu si n’ala*” (sickness has come from every angle) (stanza three lines 5) thesauruses the grave enormity awaits her, while “*Oge adighizi jta uta*” (there is no time for blames) suggest the boomeranging effect of evil doing. The Poet draws attention to retributive justice hence “*Mgbe Agarachaa ga alqta ulq...*” (When Agarachaa would come back home) (stanza 3 line 1 and 2) which landed her to her early grave. “*O biela n’ aja qcha*” (It ended in the grave).

Language and Diction

The poem is written in an accepted and flowing standard Igbo language. No dialect and idiomatic expression of any sort were used. The selection of words and expression are carefully done for the poem’s effectiveness. The emotion of contempt the poet has in mind is clearly portrayed by his choice of words and language. They all geared towards achieving his poetic end. Following the above “Agarachaa” satisfies poetic appropriateness to a large extent. In as much one can say that the poem is a good one, it is also good to observe that the setting is not true of real Igbo cultural setting environment rather it is of artificial Igbo setting environment arid as such can be said that the poet borrowed a leaf from what is obtainable in western cultural/western literature and imposed it on a real Africa culture/literature.

CONCLUSION

Haven intensively discussed this work, one can claim that the policy of appropriateness clings on the fact that in very literary effort in general and poetry in particular, there is an objective, focus and intent, which directly relate to theme and other various techniques of style for the medium to be effective and appropriate. Concerning the Igbo written poetry in particular, while it has been observed that many of the available few ones fail to imbibe the principle of appropriateness, even the fairly appropriate Ones are still not totally without serious technical and overt defects in comparison with the romance (language) poetry which they supposedly model after. A good poem is supposed to be terse, where myriads of meaning can be conveyed in just a few expressions. It should not only focus on having appropriate poetic devices only but should also be modeled after the culture/tradition of the society it projects.

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