Application of Naturalism to *Jụọ Obinna*

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Abstract

Naturalism is a philosophical enquiry that dates to the time of the great philosophers and has influenced many disciplines and subject areas. Since the emphasis of the 'naturalists' or 'realists' as the case may be is on reality and the application of the scientific method in the presentation of reality, *Jụọ Obinna* qualifies as such. Concerns have been raised regarding the applicability of naturalism to literature. This work attempts to apply the tenets of naturalism in interpreting Ubesie's *Jụọ Obinna.* It seeks to find out whether *Jụọ Obinna* is written with naturalistic principles. The researcher uses the descriptive design in analysis of the novel. It is found that *Jụọ Obinna* can be interpreted using naturalism principles. *Jụọ Obinna* is a novel on the real life situation and the activities that took place during the Nigeria – Biafra civil war. The author uses Obinna's character to showcase the events of the civil war including life in the military camps and the civilian domain. These realities help to make the novel conform "extensively to the naturalists' principles.

Introduction

One of the problems of the modern world is conflict that sometimes leads to war. The Nigerian nation witnessed such when a civil war broke out between Nigeria represented by the Federal Government and the then State of Biafra, regarded as the secessionist group. The civil war lasted about thirty months and claimed so many lives. *Jụọ Obinna* is a novel written by Tony Ubesie in 1979. It is a work on the events of the Nigeria-Biafra war written in prose form. *Jụọ Obinna* is the story of a young boy who was boasting in the village before the war started. His boasting centered on how he was going to be a powerful, brave, and strong soldier who will make exploits and dissipate the enemies. Incidentally, when the war broke out, Obinna was nowhere to be found. He lacked the courage to become a soldier.

In order, to avoid forceful conscription into the army, Obinna started hiding in his village to the extent that everyone made a jest of him. They often asked him whenever he came out of his hideout, Obinna, ị nọrịrị? (Obinna, are you still around?). With the help of a friend from his village that came back as a soldier, Obinna moved out of the village to work in a petrol selling depot. It was in this job that he was wounded by the attack of an enemy plane. He was taken to the hospital where after recovery from his ailment, he committed a crime that finally landed him to the Commando training ground. Throughout the war period, Obinna was preoccupied with how to escape from the army and finally did so. He continued his boasting among those who did not know his life in the military. When the war ended, Onyido, a witness of Obimma's activities during the civil war figuratively exposed Obinna's life during the war to the amazement and amusement of Nnenna and Ogbenyeanụ (two major characters that associated with Obinna at the village).

Literatures available to the researcher indicate that not much has been done on the application of African literary works to the theory of Naturalism. There is the need to fill the gap which the present study will be a part. *Jụọ Obinna* fits well into the naturalistic framework. As earlier mentioned, naturalism sees the novel as depicting reality. At a certain period in France, it was difficult to distinguish the novel from the ordinary text materials such as biology, physics etc. Novels became synonymous with history books because any novel that does not depict reality in its completeness has not passed for the definition of the novel. That is the naturalists stand point. This work, therefore, aims at applying the theory of Naturalism to the novel, *Jụọ Obinna***.** The study also tries to find out whether *Jụọ Obinna* is written with complete naturalistic principles.

The result of this study is expected to enrich the field of literature as it applies to some philosophical theories. It will also help to explicate the relevance of philosophy to literary criticism and appreciation. A descriptive analysis of the novel and the theory is made to get at the meeting point of the theory and the novel.

Literature Review

This section of the paper reviews the concept and theory of naturalism

Naturalism

Emile Zola is regarded as the father of naturalism. Naturalism (found mainly in the theories of *Emile Zola*) got its terms from post-Darwinian biology and asserted the wholly determined character of man and society. Since man was simply a higher animal, his nature was controlled by the regular forces of heredity and environment. So, the novelist as a social historian now appears as the taxonomic biologist, displaying the scientific objectivity in elaborate documentation and unwonted frankness in regard to bodily functions. Many of Zola's novels, at least, luckily managed to survive their methodology (Fowler, 1987).

Naturalism and realism are closely related. For the purpose of this work, they will be regarded as synonyms and as such shall interchangeably be applied. Naturalism can be taken to be a stricter form of realism because of its insistence on application of the scientific method in the presentation of reality. Realism can be regarded as the style of art and literature in which things especially unpleasant things are shown or described as they really are in life. Naturalism is also a style of art or literature which tries to show the world and people exactly as they are. Naturalism is a style of art or writing that shows people, things and experiences as they really are. It as a philosophical theory that states, that everything in the world and life is based on natural causes and laws and not in spiritual or supernatural ones. The *Wikipedia* elaborated that in philosophy, naturalism forms the idea that only natural laws operate in the universe. It stated further that, naturalism in its primary sense is also known as ontological naturalism, metaphysical naturalism, pure naturalism, philosophical naturalism, and ant supernaturalism (google.com). The *Oxford Learners Dictionary* defined naturalism in terms of arts and literature as a style and theory of representation based on the accurate depiction of detail. It further explained that naturalism philosophy centers on the belief that everything arises from natural properties and causes, which excludes Supernatural or Spiritual explanations (google.com).

Naturalism has a lot of influences on other disciplines, more especially the sciences. arts and literature. This influence is more noticeable at some periods of the evolution and development of those disciplines. Pletists in Fowler (1987), emphasizes Christian devotion and diligence as paths to the good life. Thinkers on enlightenment focused on reason and clear thinking as the sensible way to

happiness. Norton and Esposito (1995) state that Rousseau and his followers were intrigued by a third and more elusive ideal: naturalism. They say that Rousseau in his *A discourse of inequality, an account of the historical development of the human race,* distinguishes between the natural man (man as formed by nature) and social man (man as shaped by society). He argued that good education should develop the nature of man. Yet Rousseau found that mankind has not one nature but several: man originally lived in a pure state of nature" but was altered by changes beyond his control and took in a different nature. This nature, according to Rousseau, was changed as man became social.

For Rousseau, the creation of the arts and sciences caused man to become "less pure", more artificial and egoistic. According to him, man's egoistic nature prevents him from regaining the simplicity of his original human nature. Rousseau expresses pessimism about changes in the nature of modem man. In *Emile*, Rousseau's major work on education, he describes an attempt to educate a simple and pure natural child for life in a world from which social man is estranged. Emile is severed from human society to a little society lived in only by the child and his teacher. Social elements can only enter the little society through the teacher's knowledge and only at a time the teacher thinks Emile can learn from it. The question that arises from the above proposition is, how many youths can be as secluded as Emile with a private teacher in a world where youths and children so much outnumber available teachers. Also, as a social being, what is the assurance of the teacher's impeccable character. If the teacher's character is satisfactory, how did he acquire it in a world that enriches the environment for the "changing nature of man".

Norton and Esposito (1995) suggest that Rousseau's aim throughout *Emile* is to show how a natural education, unlike the artificial and formal education of society enables Emile to become social, moral, and rational while remaining true to his original nature. Rousseau argues that since Emile is educated to be a man, not a priest, a soldier, or an attorney, he will be able to do what is needed in any situation.

In this work, naturalism and realism are used interchangeably to mean the same thing for their similarities far outweigh their differences and what separates them

is infinitesimal. Fowler (1987) notes that in literary history, realism is usually associated with the effort of the novel in the nineteenth century, particularly in France, to establish it as a major literary genre. Fowler stated that the realism of Balzac and the Goncourt brother was essentially an assertion that, far from being escapist, and unreal, the novel was uniquely capable of revealing the truth of contemporary life in society.

Balzac, in L*a Comedic Humaine* saw himself as a scientific historian recording and classifying the social life of France in all its aspects. The adoption of this role in literary work led to detailed reportage of the physical minutiae of everyday life-clothes, furniture, food etc- the cataloguing of men into social types or species, and radical analyses of the economic bases of society. In this way, Balzac and the Goncourt brother launched naturalism into literary writings.

Textual Analysis

Jụọ Obinna is a novel that portrays the reality of the Nigeria-Biafra war that took place between 1966 and 19.70. The author uses the character of Obinna to unmask all that took place in that period of political 'meltdown'. He opened up with the scene of how boys and men where forcefully conscripted into the military. Obinna made every effort not to be a victim but eventually fell into the hands of the soldiers. Before then he had thrown light on how life in the village looked like at the inception of the war. The author now brought to fore the scene of the military training and the activities of the soldiers at the war front which includes the combat tactics. Obinna's training as a 'Commando' and their subsequent movements to 'war fronts' express these.

From Obinna and Ọnyịdo, we also note the minor elements of the activities taking place in the military camps. We see the fear, anxiety of some soldiers, and the scene of escape. From the escape of Obinna, a light is again thrown on the life of the civilians during the war time as represented by the scene at Ufuma and the adjoining towns. The author maintains the character of Obinna as a "cunning" and "boastful" personality. He is a representative of reality. In him is seen that the inner "nature" of man is difficult to alter. As situation and environment change, that inner nature adapts according to the new situation to its nature. Obinna's life

of cunning, fear, boasting etc. played out in his actions throughout the war. So also, is Onyido, Emeka, Nnenna, Ogbenyeanụ, etc.

To portray the reality of the civil war, the author of *Jụọ Obinna* used a simple language that is easy to comprehend. If he used a special register, he explains it in the course of discuss. His plots are well linked up with stories built around them. Since he is talking about reality, on issues familiar to the environment, one does not get bored reading it. In the naturalists' tradition, *Jụọ Obinna* can go for a model that shows explicitness, reality, and truth.

Conclusion

Naturalism like many other "isms" have so much to contribute to the progress of life and betterment of human beings in terms of explication of problems associated with conceptualization and intellectuality. It is easily plausible because it touches on the practical aspect of life which a "layman" easily understands. It plays a great role in literary works because literary works are not devoid of life. "Literature" as generally agreed, reflects society and accepts reality.

At its extreme, the naturalists' program me battled with two difficulties. The first was that, it, technically becomes obsessed with physical detail and topographical accuracy for its own or history's sake, and so novels may amount to little more than guide books or social documents. Secondly, there was confusion about the distinction between art and history or sociology. It is true that indirectly, a creative writer is a historian in that the "realities" of the moment are not out of place in his work. Fowler (l987), however, opined that the novelist is only metaphorically and incidentally a historian. Whatever the relations of his art with the 'realities' of society, he is finally involved in the making of fictions, and his responsibilities to 'form' that the historian or sociologist does not. Fowler further observes that the failure to acknowledge this crucial distinction is evident in the development of realistic theory into *Naturalism*, whose for an even greater accuracy and inclusiveness rested on an analogy with scientific method.

Jụọ Obinna, though having a lot of the attributes of naturalism distinguishes itself also with the attributes of modern novels. The realities in *Jụọ Obinna* are artistically played. Onyido for instance was used as the window to pierce through the army

life during the Nigeria- Biafra civil war. Nnenna and Ogbenyeanụ represented part of the civil society. There are proverbs and idioms that spiced the entire novel. The well arranged plots and the story links, highlights the ingenuity of the author in arranging a perfect marriage between reality and artistry which is the hallmark of modern literary writing.

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