

From Historical Reality to Didactic Metaphor: Socio-political Re-awakening and Self Illumination as Praxis in Emeka Nwabueze's the Dragon's Funeral

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Abstract

This paper analytically looks at Emeka Nwabueze's¹ attempt at a dramatic representation of a major historical reality, widely referred to as the Aba Women's Riot, which occurred during colonial Nigeria. The primary interest is to examine the contexts of some layers of pertinent didactic metaphors embedded in the play, *The Dragon's Funeral*, which among other perspectives are describable as an attempt at fostering communal socio-political re-awakening and an individuated self-illumination. Specifically, this analysis assesses the aesthetics of Nwabueze's creative utilization of this historical reality as a source material for drama creation. Essentially, our discussion will involve a critical appraisal of the texture of Nwabueze's characterization and his framing of language as a means of creating valid stratum of didactic metaphors in the play, *The Dragon's Funeral*. Thematically, this study seeks to illuminate on the notion that more often than not, that the degree of sufficiency or the degree of insufficiency in an application of deft political manoeuvrings and diplomatic sagacity by a person (particularly a politician) in public speaking as Nwabueze reflects in *The Dragon's Funeral*, can either blight or advance such a person's social standing as well as his career. Theoretically, this contextualization sets out to elaborate on the supposition that the sufficiency or otherwise of effective language usage by an individual can contribute significantly towards the defining of that individual's persona and public outlook in combination with some relevant subsisting factors. Therefore, to evaluate the selected play, this study adopts 'content analyses' as the preferred analytical approach.

Key words: Characterization, Didactic, History, Language, Metaphor, and Source Material

1. Introduction:

Perspectives on History as Source Material for Drama Creation

Though our primary interest in this analysis is to discuss the typology of a story's source material, in the mean time, we shall briefly look at some relevant dimensions to story-telling non-specifically. Logically, the aesthetics of the act of story-telling can be viewed from varied perspectives; nonetheless, it is arguably plausible to suggest that the process of a story's delivery remains essentially central. Story-telling is an art, and the quality of this art is predicated on the level of skill the story-teller is capable of manifesting. Again the determination of the quality of story-telling supposedly rests on the shoulders of the recipients. In essence the recipients appraise the act of story-telling from their own different points of view in a bid to establish, among other things how apt and enthralling the delivery process and the content are. Therefore, it is the recipients, who should determine the level of accomplishment a story-teller and the story he delivers will attain. To deliver a story, a story-teller adopts a preferred communication medium, such as writing, singing, acting, painting and so on. The logic here is that writing a play is a form of story-telling, and the basic communication sub-mediums for the playwright are the language, characterization and the created environment. Language in this study's context entails all forms of speech produced by the characters. Dramatic characterization represents an artistic creation of dramatic persona through the process of creative invention, composition, embedding, inculcation, and imposition of selected distinctive attributes in the character. Examples of these attributes are the physical qualities, gender classification, naming, age definition, relevant emotional and psychological qualities, social status, ideological inclinations, and individuated taste in things as well as sufficient sense of likes and dislikes. The created environment represents the locale of the story or the specific geographical space, in which there is a specific kind of dwelling

¹Emeka Nwabueze is an internationally renowned Nigerian scholar, a professor of Theatre Studies, a playwright, a critic and an Africologist. He has spent most of his academic life both as an undergraduate and an academic at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, located in south-east Nigeria. This undoubtedly has contributed in no small measure in entrenching his understanding of Nigeria, particularly the Igbo, his central literary subject and terrain. His plays include *The Dragon's Funeral*, *When the Arrow Rebounds*, (a dramatized recreation of Chinua Achebe's novel *Arrow of God*), *Echoes of Madness*, *Spokesman for the Oracle*, *Fate of a Maiden*, *A Parliament of Vultures*, *Guardian of the Cosmos*, *A Dance of the Dead* and a children's storybook entitled *Agaba and the Giant Creature*. These works exhibit Nwabueze's rich resource and deep understanding of the various dimensions and praxis to Nigerian Studies, as regards to her political, historical, sociological realities and journey.

place/space and its concomitant attributes. The perspective here is that the recipients of a play are the one who will judge a playwright's quality of story delivery through their preferred analytical evaluation of the playwright's characterization, created environment and the language application aptness and the play's enthralling qualities. Some of the specifics they could be looking at to analyze the degree of aptness and the enthralling quality are the literary texture, contexts, mood, and propriety of relevant factors and variables. A story-teller's success starts with the choice of story which has the propensity to create the most enthralling feeling on the sensibilities and consciousnesses of most of the intended recipients. At this point, it is worthy of note to remark that while some stories are adjudged as enthralling, others are not, although different recipients are most likely to react differently to the same story. Among all forms of drama material sources, history as a source material of a drama story, places the story-teller and the published story at an inevitable passionate scrutiny by different interest groups. Despite this, evidentially, playwrights have not shied away from reaching out to history to excavate their source materials for dramatic stories. By way of definition, the expression history can be described as "the record of anything that has ever happened in the past, however long ago or however recently" (Clark 1967: 1). History helps us to understand a society's past, thus it brings about a certain degree of illumination about the present, and it is ultimately an important tool for contemplating and speculating about the future. History shapes a people's world-view, either by propelling them to avoid, discontinue, or indeed to continue with certain practices. In line with the scholarly thinking in Aniaḡo's paper entitled 'The Contexts and Typologies of Literary Source Materials in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Burning Grass*: Focus on the Actual and Typical Realities', realities exist variously and differently, and realities can be location specific, culture specific, evolutionary, and has different manifestations (2012: 189). Explaining further on the perspective that creative writings are essentially generated differently from a creative combination of typologies of realities, Aniaḡo submits that:

[...] narrative captures realities in form of stories, and these captured realities are from a specific source material. By source materials we mean the basis of a given story as well as that of the objects and subjects represented in the story. The idea here is that a given story must have existed somehow either as wholly or partly, as a past occurrence or combinations of past occurrences, or past happenings, or idea in the consciousness before it is narrated by the narrator. (2012: 189 – 190)

In this present discuss we are focusing on the type of source material that is describable as historical source material. As Ameh Dennis Akoh (2007: 112) rightly observe, history "remains a consistent source material to playwrights of all generation" and "these playwrights have responded differently to historical materials available to them." Akoh goes on to explain that while some playwrights "have tried not to deviate from the course of historical events, others have consciously 'forced' on the material, their artistic vision" (122). He notes that for instance Ahmed Yerima in the plays *The Trials of Ovanramwen* and *Attahiru* "seem to pay so much attention to historical authenticity" (Akoh 122), whereas Ademeso contends that "Osofisan's use of history, myth, legends and folktales is not in the direct, faithful and total adherence to the account" (2009: 21). Ademeso's contribution supports an earlier observation by Awodiya, which suggests that Osofisan applies history source material "in a subversive manner, by exploiting the considerable potential of tradition with positive impact on the contemporary Nigerian life" (1995: 57). In line with Awodiya's point of view, Saint Gbilekaa notes that:

In Osofisan's drama, history is dynamic; history is not viewed as being static, it changes. Furthermore, history is presented from the familiar monolithic view but as being apprehensive from various angles. He shows the other side of history, too. He shows that even in the historical past, the misuses of power were challenged. By showing the contradictions of the past and how they were challenged, the playwright is subtly calling on members of the audience to challenge injustice and oppression. (1997: 78)

Thus Gbilekaa summarizes Osofisan's authorial style in the application of history as a creative attempt at appropriating the relevant essence and influences of history, without pandering towards a mere repetition of widely known incidents therein. As regards to the significant interest on history as a source material for drama, Chidi Amuta contends that:

The historian is concerned with empirical data, operating as much as possible at the level of facts in pursuit of specific truths. On the other hand, the literary artist is concerned with historical data to the extent that they provide him with experiences that constitute the content of his art. But the language of the literary artist does not subsist on facts. He mediates facts in pursuit of both specific and universal truths while trying to please or disturb the process. (1988: 87)

In line with Amuta's point of view, Ahmed Yerima a playwright who had created a number of his plays from historical source materials buttresses on the existing authorial freedom by explaining that:

The relationship between history and drama is one in which the playwright attempts through his play to offer explanation to a historical event while forcing on the historical event his thematic

preoccupation [...] history is an integral part of the soul of the community. And like myths and folk stories, they form that rich aspect of the cultural heritage which serves as material source for the playwright. (2003: 61)

According to Austin Uzoma Nwagbara, “the conjuration of history as a metaphor of creativity in African literary writings represents, a seminal reconstruction of the intensity of the collective experiences of the continent, a re-living of its joys and pains” (2010: 126). Nwagbara goes on to explain that there exists a presumption that “through artful reconstruction of the past in elaborately defined communicative constructs and significations, literature undertakes an ardent and rigorous ritual of recollection and reminiscence which all by itself entails a celebration of the verdant and arid enactment of a society’s experience through time and space” (2010: 127). An evident perspective in Nwagbara’s postulation is that the use of actual past occurrences, – which we refer to as history – in creating a drama, implies that such drama will hardly be viewed as just a playwright’s imagination or a mere fictive creation. Rather this study’s findings indicate that the recipients see such as recasts and retellings of peoples’ past realities and defining heritage. Similarly, Mohammed Inuwa Umar-Buratai notes that “the fact that over time, history has provided the frame work and plot for many plays in different societies is perhaps, because it is an embodiment of the soul of the community” (2012: 143). Hence, because history is no doubt subject-specific, it is very likely that it will continue to draw a lot of interest from the concerned interest groups, particularly those communities whose history are excavated for drama creation. In Nigeria and beyond examples of plays which are clearly products of substantial or mere incidental application of history abound. Some of these plays are Ola Rotimi’s *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* and Ahmed Yerima’s *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen*, which are both created differently from the incidents that occurred during the British siege on the ancient Benin Kingdom in the present day Edo state, Nigeria during the reign of Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi. Emmy Idegu’s *The Legendary Inikpi*¹. Wale Ogunyemi’s *The Ijaiye War* and Ola Rotimi’s *Kurumi* are generated as well differently from the events of the Ijaiye wars which occurred in south-west Nigeria. Ebrahim Hussein’s *Kinjeketile* was created from the events surrounding the Maji-Maji uprising during the colonial period in Tangayinka which has been renamed Tanzania. Ahmed Yerima’s *Attahiru* is drawn from the history documenting the details of the fall of Sokoto Caliphate into the hands of British colonialists in the early twentieth century in war of 1903. Wale Ogunyemi’s *Queen Amina of Zazzau* encapsulates the stories of the warrior queen, known as Queen Amina of Zazzau (in present day Kaduna) which occurred during pre-colonial Nigeria. *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi* written by Ngugi wa Thiongo and Micere Mugo is based on the Mau-Mau armed resistance and guerrilla warfare against the British colonial government in Kenya. Another drama creation that is based on actual history is Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*. This play was inspired by an actual occurrence in south-west Nigeria, in which case a certain overzealous British colonial officer did interrupted a traditional ritual suicide of Olokun Esin Jinadu in 1945. As Uche-Chimere Nwaozuzu rightly observe in his paper entitled ‘Emeka Nwabueze and the Tragic Tension: An Existentialist Critique of Characterization in *The Dragon’s Funeral*’, the Aba Women’s Riot² as a literary source material, “has yielded much literature” (2011: 109). Two of the plays that readily come to mind are Olu Obafemi’s *Suicide Syndrome*, and Ezenta Eze’s *The Cassava Ghost*. Both Playwrights in their plays artfully apply the Aba Women’s Riot in a somewhat incidental manner. However, Nwabueze’s play *The Dragon’s Funeral* currently remains the widely

¹ The Legendary Inikpi is a play that captures theatrically, the war between the Igala and the Beni people from 1515-1516 Nigeria. History has it that the Ata Igala (the Igala King), Ayegba Oma Idoko was a bosom friend to the Oba of Benin to whom he always made eunuchs for his palace. Somehow, there was some misunderstanding that made this hitherto cordial relationship sour. It turned bitter when the Ata Igala thought the messengers he sent to his friend the Oba who did not return home were captured by the Oba preparatory to taking war to Ida the traditional and administrative headquarters of the Igala kingdom and if possible, annex Igalaland (Mcpilips Nwachukwu, 2012)

² According Charles Ukeje “the demonstrations” which later became widely known as Aba Women’s Riot “began on 18 November 1929 and lasted almost 3 months. They covered several areas: four divisions in the Province of Owerri, two out of the three divisions in Calabar Province, and Afikpo division in Ogoja Province. The protests occurred most intensely along important trade and market routes dominated by itinerant women traders” (2004: 610). We learn from the works of Davies (1960), Afigbo (1966; 1972), and Arifalo (2001), that the Women’s demonstration was not only as a result of anticipated taxation on women rather it was also instigated by a combination of several other issues which the women felt were part of the senseless subjugation on the masses. Among these issues are perceived extortion and high-handedness being perpetrated by the warrant chiefs, the ongoing intimidation and enforcement of unpaid labour, the threat of imprisonment, unfair pricing of farm products particularly palm oil and palm kernel against imported items such as tobacco and spirits, which were usually exorbitant.

recognized attempt at utilizing the substance of the Aba Women's Riot deeply and elaborately in creating a drama. By encapsulating the historical details of the Aba Women's Riot into a drama, arguably Nwabueze's has succeed in bringing back to the public domain some crucial highpoints of that history, which has valuable didactic significance.

2. Nwabueze's Utilization of History in Creating the Play, *The Dragon's Funeral*

In the focused study, *The Dragon's Funeral*, Nwabueze exhibits a robust understanding of the society and culture of the people (the Igbo) whose historical reality he recreates in a drama. This awareness by him arguably we can attribute to his deep familiarity with the myriad of typical and actual realities of many Igbo communities, and individuals, which he has witnessed or studied for more than three decades. Nwabueze as a scholar has spent most of his academic life both as an undergraduate and an academic at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka which undoubtedly has contributed in no small measure in entrenching his understanding of the Igbo, as regards to their historical, political, social and cultural perspectives. This knowledge is evident in Nwabueze's literary footprints. The notion here is that even though a writer writes a story, which perhaps is not about him, nevertheless he would end up including a deep slice of his socio-political perspectives and conceptual frame in his writing. Nwabueze's socio-political and conceptual frame as presented in *The Dragon's Funeral* is to a large extent propelled by his encounter with the Igbo environment where as a youth he did experienced the pulse, realities and culture of the Igbo, many of which are part of enactments in several communal performances from time to time at different occasions. In one of his studies, Nwabueze contends that drama to a playwright is a medium through which he can extend his perspective and "knowledge of people of other lands", thereby creating a platform for others to learn "from other people's experiences" (2003a: 123). Similarly Nwabueze also notes that "a play is not merely a piece of literature meant to be read alone" rather "there is a peculiar uniqueness in drama as opposed to other forms of literature" because "drama is literature that talks and moves about before the eyes of its audience" (2003a: 122). Based on the above point of view, it is plausible to observe that Nwabueze without doubt endorses the role of didacticism in African playwriting. Hence, it is not surprising that Nwabueze agrees that "committed African plays are responses to gathering gloom in the various segments of African Society" therefore playwrights, specifically the committed kind, are expected to use their drama to "hit the crucial targets in order to enlighten the people and make them aware of their situation in society" (2003a: 125). As we have emphasized earlier, in *The Dragon's Funeral* Nwabueze applies his knowledge of Igbo realities in his attempt at using a major historical incident as a source material for drama composition aimed at creating didactic metaphors. By historical incident, the researcher indicates that the source material the playwright utilizes in the play actually occurred, which is the 1929 Aba Women's Riot against the Colonial Administration's attempt to impose tax on the Aba women in south-east Nigeria. In line with the perspective of this study, a didactic metaphor is an expression or expressions which embody multi-representational realities, aimed at deep illumination on a non-literal level. In the play, Nwabueze uses characterization, the ensuing conflicts, the outcome of the conflicts and the expressions made by characters as forms of didactic metaphors. To attain a deeper appreciation of how Nwabueze applies characterization as didactic metaphors, this paper examines the following characters: Adaugo (the women's leader); Chief Okeugo (a senior warrant chief with the Colonial Administration, who is also referred to as 'the dragon'), and Mazi Ekwedike, the narrator and a popular village elder. As a literary approach, Nwabueze uses a narrator in *The Dragon's Funeral* and the manner in which he applies this technique makes the narrator's narration a story within a story. In this instance, the narrator is the character named Mazi Ekwedike who is the village's griot. He is about seventy years old and generally referred to as the wise one. Nwabueze presents him as an embodiment of balanced wisdom and delight. Nwabueze also projects Mazi Ekwedike's strong sense of diplomacy and tact as that which are admirable. The story Mazi Ekwedike narrates to other characters (the market women) is the playwright's main story – a village market women's revolt against colonial administrators' proposed taxation of women and the tribulations of one Chief Okeugo, a victim of circumstance and hubris.

The plot of *The Dragon's Funeral* is arranged in ten 'Movements' and an epilogue. In the initial scene, the play's story opens in *Orie* market in an evening, where the market women were singing folkloristic songs designed to demonstrate their attitudes to themselves and their society at large. They were gradually gathering their wares in readiness to depart from the village market at the end of a day's trading when the village griot, Mazi Ekwedike strolled into the market. Mazi Ekwedike paused at some point in his stroll and characteristically he looked at the market women briefly. Apparently satiated, he began to stroll along before some of the women noticed his presence. One after the other, they warmly exchanged the usual greetings and pleasantries with him. All of a sudden, he perfunctorily reminisced about Adaugo Nwanyeruwa, the daughter of Ojim, the play's heroine, who in the past owned a store in the very *Orie* market, where they are presently gathered. Some of the women on hearing Mazi Ekwedike mention Adaugo, the famous heroine, got manifestly excited, which encouraged them to express their desire to hear her story again from him. This is notwithstanding that they

independently acknowledged having heard some versions of Adaugo's exploits severally. Understandably, in the prevailing atmosphere, which was fuelled by their earlier expressed intent, most of them individually went on to massage Mazi Ekwedike's ego by telling him that they would love to hear Adaugo's story again, especially from a master storyteller like him. Warmly Mazi Ekwedike acceded to their entreaties and went on with finesse to re-tell the story of Adaugo whom he describes as a leader of the famous Aba women rebellion. Also as part of the plot's style, Nwabueze arranges Mazi Ekwedike's narration in such a way that the eventual end to the women's uprising culminates in the prosecution of Chief Okeugo in the second scene of Movement One. The prosecution became necessary in a bid to placate the market women who had started a rebellion having concluded that Chief Okeugo was at the forefront of the attempt to implement the imposition of taxation on them. Consequently, the Colonial Administration swiftly sacrificed Chief Okeugo by arraigning and finding him guilty. Therefore, Chief Okeugo was singled out as a scapegoat in a colonial law court presided over by a white British colonial judge. This embodies a didactic metaphor which denotes the vagaries of survival in an over-heating polity. This scene ends with Chief Okeugo being sentenced to five years' imprisonment with hard-labour. Chief Okeugo's arraignment and sentencing was a sequel to the official withdrawal of the proposed imposition of tax on women, which was secured by the market women. This effectively gave victory to the heroine Adaugo and her fellow gallant women agitators. In the play, Nwabueze presents some unambiguous reasons behind the rebellion, the nature of social conflict it instigated, the centrality of a fit-for-purpose kind of leadership in the carrying-out of a rebellion of that nature, and the probable consequences of such social conflict. These differently can be deduced as didactic metaphors. Also in his plot arrangement, what Nwabueze did was to take choice slices of the focal aspects of the history, because logically it is impossible to recreate everything that had happen in a single dramatic text.

In his characterization Nwabueze builds his story around three characters and these characters' realities and personas can be viewed as didactic metaphors as well. One of these three characters is Adaugo. She represents the famous Aba market women leader, variously referred to as *Achalugo* (an Igbo expression which metaphorically means quintessential, particularly applied in reference to a woman epitomized as a source of pride, mainly due to her elegance). Nwabueze propels the characters to provide deep, juxtaposed and metaphorical exposé of themselves as well as those of other characters. For instance, Mazi Ekwedike describes Adaugo Nwanyeruwa as, "the mighty man-woman who led the Aba women in an uprising that shook the Colonial Administration" who had imposed tax on women (p.7). Through the utterances of the character Mazi Ekwedike, Nwabueze presents Adaugo as a heroine, a protagonist, and an exceptional leader who was very meticulous, highly respectable and courageous. Also on the didactic metaphor appreciable from Mazi Ekwedike's presentation of the character Adaugo, one can appreciate that Adaugo is a symbol of a people's leader, which actually means the one who serves the people with power entrusted in her. Adaugo embodies the concept of leadership through humility and selflessness. Adaugo also represents a peoples' mandate that germinates into a people's monument. Nwabueze metaphorically emphasizes on the importance of nature and nurture in matters on leadership that would become people's monument, such as the leadership of the historic Aba women's Riot. To recreate this monumental status, Nwabueze presents Adaugo as a women leader with an unassailable political sagacity and a remarkable acumen. He goes on to clad her with generous glorious larger-than-life image, through profound eulogy by Mazi Ekwedike:

Daughters of our land [...], seeing you here at the historical market makes me remember Adaugo Nwanyeruwa, the daughter of Ojim. Nwanyeruwa, the valiant's jaw that grows gray beards. Nwanyeluwa, the mighty man-woman who led the Aba woman in an uprising that shook the Colonial Administration. (p. 6)

As a didactic metaphor Nwabueze uses history to remind the spectators and readers of the play, *The Dragon's Funeral* that legitimacy in leadership can only attain the heights of popular legitimacy, and thereafter transcends into people's immortal monument if the leader's nature and nurture manifests popular appeal. Nwabueze goes on to extol some of the popular appeal by painting a picture of a down-to-earth, amiable, yet respect commanding persona in the character Adaugo through Mazi Ekwedike, who notes that Adaugo:

[...], didn't have a big stall, yet her authority towered over all the other women. Yes, she was big. Tall thing like that, the kind you don't see on the road everyday, the kind people, who appreciate feminine beauty, call *Achalugo*. (p. 7)

Nwabueze adds other attributes that tends to complete the building of Adaugo's persona in line with the historical records on the heroine of the 1929 Aba Women's Riot, through the character Ekwedike in the following words.

[...]. Some people called her the mother of the market, while others gave the appellation of the dogged stone that blunts the hoe. She was the only woman of her time to be conferred with the praise names reserved for men. (p. 7)

Adaugo is heralded as a woman of distinguished eloquence, tact and political maturity through her use of

numerous literal and figurative expressions, proper diction and forthrightness, which are metaphorically products of her nature and nurture. What this suggests is that the ability to possess such speech skills ensures effective public speaking which is an imperative tool for result assured mass mobilization of several kinds. Adaugo is also characterized as possessing a disarming ability for ideological orientation and courage building. This she effectively applied in her process of mobilizing the market women for rebellion, despite pockets of initial dissenting voices amongst the women. Referring to Adaugo as the mighty man-woman indicates that she is personified as larger-than-life, a phenomenon that evolved into a legendary status. It also suggests that her kind is not only distinctive but also uncommon. This is a reminder that despite emphasis on apt nurturing, the qualities which are attributable to nature of a person are not to be overlooked. This is because some individuals are apparently built naturally to lead more than their peers, while nurturing enhances such natural gifts and attributes. To this end Nwabueze provides a salient didactic metaphor which expresses the kind of leaders Nigeria and other countries with leadership problem dearly need in order to gravitate from the throes of economic stagnation to the path of progress and good governance.

The second major character is Chief Ahamefula Okeugo who is also referred to as ‘the dragon.’ He like Adaugo is leader. He is a colonial warrant chief, one among few hand-picked stooges. Nwabueze characterizes him as an egomaniac, power-drunk, self-centred, politically prominent and dominant individual, who during the period of the women rebellion, exhibited clear catastrophic diplomatic deficiency that consumed him. Nwabueze through the characters Chinasa (a market woman) and Mazi Ekwedike presents varied opinions on the person of Chief Okeugo. While Chinasa, an evidently effusive individual thinks Chief Okeugo “[...] was a fool” (p. 16), on the other hand an immensely poetic Mazi Ekwedike suggests that:

Okeugo was a wise man. But he did not realize that a child that shakes a tree trunk is merely shaking his head and heart. A lamb that wants to grow horns should be heavy at the elbows. Our people say that the man whose strength intoxicates him will one day surrender that strength to the burial mat. That the pleasure of madness is a secret concealed and enjoyed by the mad men alone, that a goat lying on the floor is lying on its own skin. (p. 17)

The understanding of the language applied by Mazi Ekwedike suggests palpable ambivalence if its appreciation is solely taken from its literal point-of-view. However, contextually, Mazi Ekwedike’s view which is laced with didactic metaphors provides varied perspectives. Firstly, it is appreciable that the speaker Mazi Ekwedike is evidently knowledgeable, meticulous and voluble. Secondly, it is apparent that Chief Okeugo is not at that instance the dream role model. Noticeably the proverb used by Mazi Ekwedike juxtaposes the possession of wisdom with the eventual actions taken by Chief Okeugo which is not describable as wise but unwise. The manner in which Mazi Ekwedike chose to express his point-of-view which is mainly metaphorical, conversely serves dual purposes. It indicates to the readers/audience on the one hand that he (Mazi Ekwedike) is a well-informed meticulous person and on the other, it presents the persona of Chief Okeugo as foolhardy. The following proverb by Mazi Ekwedike: “[...] he did not realize that a child that shakes a tree trunk is merely shaking his head and heart”, is a didactic metaphor. Explaining from an Igbo socio-cultural worldview, a child is perceived as possessing little worldly experience in comparing to an adult. Hence it is that individual with a child’s mind-set that will go on to dissipate his or her energy by attempting to shake a tree trunk. Consequently, Chief Okeugo in the situation in question would be seen to have taken not very wise steps. What this metaphor suggests is that Chief Okeugo should have known the limit of his abilities; hence he should have known that the forces he attempted to confront were by far too enormous for him. Also, Chief Okeugo’s actions could be taken as foolhardy not because he was a naive person rather due to his inability to contain his hubris which eventually impelled him for a major reversal of fortune.

3. Conclusion: Deductions and Correlations

The language Nwabueze adopts indicates that for a writer to adequately ensure propriety of dialogue with the characterization, such a writer is expected to take into consideration the social standing, the given circumstances, age of characters, and the immediate and wider environment in which the characters are located. Nwabueze shows sufficient understanding and knowledge of the actual true-life replica of his characters. Nwabueze also indicates that he has a good sense of how his characters should feel, how they would relate to the environment in which they find themselves, hence his success in creating authenticity of portrayal. The application of historical reality as didactic metaphor portends the relevance of culture specific knowledge and this Nwabueze demonstrates in many ways in the play. The essence of taking some time to reflect on the centrality and importance of adequate expression in a writer’s bid to convincingly make his/her characters to carry their message to the readers and audience as the case may be, is to note that without adequate expression, however topical the subject matter of a play is, it could lack adequate conviction, effectiveness and propriety. Therefore to create conviction, effectiveness and propriety in character expressions, Nwabueze applies the circumstances and persona of characters as regards to the era, locale and setting in which the story is located, as well as the culture-

specific manner of speech applicable to the Igbo – the ethnic locale of the drama. As Gloria Kempton rightly notes, “dialogue reveals the characters’ motives and opposing agendas” (2004: 4). The dialogue between Adaugo and the market women establishes a conflict and a thematic concern of the play which revolves around the realities of unpopular policies by government.

Adaugo: Women of my ancestral land, there is dust in air. Evil men have enveloped our land. The name of that evil, that dust, is government. We have heard different rumours about what government is doing and even what it intends to do. Our husbands have heard it, our children have heard it, even the trees of our land have heard it. The serene atmosphere of this village will soon be disrupted by the strangers in our midst who call themselves government. If we go to the market, it is government, if we cough, it is government. Women of Ngwaland, shall we escape into the ant-hole because of government? (p. 18)

In Adaugo’s speech above, some aspects of her expressions are latent though glaring. For instance, the word ‘dust’ in the context of Adaugo’s speech depicts as well as symbolizes the government. From the Igbo cultural and socio-political worldview, this symbolism defines the subject government as a nuisance of a particular nature, which will eventually be over, though while it lasts, it is detestable. Still within Igbo sociology, dust in the air connotes trouble. Also it is noteworthy to add that the imagery ‘dust’ suggests that its representation which is government will fizzle out in the near future, just as any time dust is in the atmosphere it eventually settles, even though the time it will fizzle out is not certain. To suggest that the trees have heard what the government is doing or planning to do, is a form of personification, and exaggeration widely applied amongst Igbo people. Also amongst the Igbo, this form of expression is usually applied to drive home the notion that whatever it is that is afoot is clearly by no means a secret. The expression the “strangers in our midst who call themselves government”, suggests political dissent, dissociation, and latent rebellion by the concerned people. While the comment “if we cough it is government” is a form of exaggeration which adds embellishment to the speakers utterance/oratory. It also establishes the notion that the government has become so ‘intruding’. In the question “shall we escape into the ant-hole because of government”, Adaugo applies a metaphor which seeks to gauge the state of her listeners’ responsiveness to her speech, by probing their courage to confront their problem. Nwabueze firmly establishes Adaugo as a skilful orator who has the requisite ability to balance her expressions to subsume some fundamental ingredients of sublime public speech such as entertainment, point-of-view, authority, ideology, excitement and information, to achieve maximally the desired results.

In his language application, Nwabueze adopts realism by giving his characters the kind of expressions aptly applicable to their status, the story’s setting, and the characters’ circumstances which are representative of the time of the historical occurrence, and the worldview of the Igbo people of the era. Prominent in the characters’ expressions is the application of metaphorical expressions which are more often than not culture specific. To appreciate the culture specific and non-culture specific meanings in some of the metaphorical expressions in the utterances made by some characters in *The Dragon’s Funeral* as authorial technique of attaining propriety of characterization, this paper recommends ‘relevance theory’. This concept as Andrew Goatly explains, aims to provide “considerable interpretative work” on given expressions “besides the decoding of their semantics” by focusing on need to understand “the similarities or analogies on which the metaphor is based” (1997: 137). Consequently ‘relevance theory’, Goatly proposes that “metaphorical understanding depends on the processes and principles involved in the interplay between knowledge of the language system, knowledge of the context: situation and co-text, the surrounding text, and the physical and social situation in which the text is produced” (1997: 137). Goatly illuminates further by noting that “we also factor in background schematic knowledge: factual and socio-cultural, background knowledge about the world, and the society of our language community” (1997: 137). In line with Goatly, Shelley Ashdown notes that:

Language as the principal semiotic system of a culture is perhaps the most important phenomenon by which a people frame, express, and advance their worldview. Language is grounded in cultural meaning; indeed it is a complex network of social signs and reflects the interaction of a person with reality. Thus the analytic purpose of considering language in research is an exploration of how language reflects important cultural and social ideals, understandings, and patterns of thought. Exploring language then can be a medium through which the cultural maze of jumbled thought may be sorted into a clearer understanding of indigenous reality. (2012: 2)

Assessing the aesthetics in Nwabueze’s propriety in his application of language in *The Dragon’s Funeral*, in relation to the thematic concerns, this paper proposes ‘conceptualization’. This is an analytical approach through which a discuss will attempt to examine critically the propriety of the application of language either as monologue or dialogue in relation to the play’s major thematic concerns. In explaining the notion of propriety and centrality of effective language in playwriting, Lee Jacobus observes that “fine playwrights have developed ways of revealing character” (1989: 22). To attain an agreeable realism in a dramatic portrayal of material history as a didactic metaphor, the propriety in the application of language in relation to characterisation, Noel

Greig contends that a writer, “would look for a consciousness of poetic and a feeling of command in the use of the language; real value being given to the words and how they were used, and how the sentences held together” (2005: 41). Similarly, Kempton notes that the use of language as regards to its context as dialogue does “not only creates space on the page, which is visually appealing, but it’s also what brings characters to life in a story, which is emotionally appealing” (2004: 4). Characters in a pivotal historic occurrence such as the Aba Women’s Riot are not necessarily the playwright’s creation, they represent historic individuals whom some communities either venerate or despise. To such people, they have significant emotional link, hence misrepresentations by any playwright could draw rebuttals, hostile responses that could have varying ramifications for such a writer in question. In re-enacting history as didactic metaphor, a playwright’s language stands out as central. This is because it is through language that the playwright may attain appropriate representation that will not be viewed as deliberate distortion or an affront by concerned readers and audience. Consequently, even in the application of his poetic licence, Nwabueze understands that character representation of subjects with historic dimension as didactic metaphor requires skill and propriety of language. In this regard, an informed evaluation of Nwabueze’s dramatic style in *The Dragon’s Funeral*, particularly in the utilization of language indicates a good understanding of the story he is adapting, the ability to create dialogue which typifies the era of the story’s occurrence and an interesting sense of propriety. A careful study of *The Dragon’s Funeral*, points towards Nwabueze’s ability to tell his story as didactic metaphor focusing on topics such as gender emancipation, nifty political manoeuvring and the vagaries of conflict of interests, with a touch of convincing objectivity that is devoid of peculiar extremes of bias academic ideological inclinations. To this end, one appreciates Nwaozuzu’s observation that Nwabueze’s attitude in *The Dragon’s Funeral* “is not that of mythic elusiveness, but of realistic affirmation” (2011: 110). Thus Nwabueze, Nwaozuzu contends, “does not however present his audience with the ambivalence and double-edged endings in an attempt to create a theatre of polemics” (2011: 110). Nwaozuzu also observes that “in celebrating the exploits of the women, Nwabueze highlights the universality of their vision”, thus in *The Dragon’s Funeral* “the plot celebrates the ultimate victory of the oppressed women, hence he (Nwabueze) deliberately picks the heroic highlights for dramatization while ignoring the ignoble and barbaric attempts to suppress the revolt by the colonial government and its cronies” (2011: 110 – 111). Again, this achievement with *The Dragon’s Funeral*, as expressed in this study shows how central delivery is in the act of story-telling. Kempton on her summation on the act of delivering the characters as didactic metaphors and their motivations to the reader, notes that the writer’s task is to let the “reader in on what our characters want, as naturally as possible, even when what our characters want is on an unconscious level and they don’t even know they want it” (2004: 38). To assist the reader in appreciating the characters as didactic metaphors, Nwabueze uses initial dialogue as a means of engaging the characters in conflict as well as using dialogue to increase their struggle. In Nwabueze’s application of dialogue as didactic metaphors, there are evidences of effective application of language which assists the reader or audience in defining the persona, their ambitions, their mien as well as their other inclinations. Also, in his technique of applying dialogue, Nwabueze assists the reader to appreciate the setting of the play, the quality of the human persona the characters are representing. Also Nwabueze lets his dialogue to enrich the deep and versatility of his characters. In *The Dragon’s Funeral* Nwabueze in his attempt at a utilization of a historical occurrence as source material for didactic metaphor applies some defining techniques that facilitate appropriately the location of the play’s action in a village in Igbo-land (specifically Ngwa in the present Abia State) in south-east Nigeria as means of retaining the aura of the historical occurrence. Nwabueze rather than introduce entirely fictive names applies some actual names of the individuals involved in the actual occurrence (the Aba Women’s Riot of 1929) such as Chief Okeugo and Mark Emeruwa. He also uses the actual names of places such as *orie* market, Ngwa and Aba. The application of actual names of individuals and places as the ones in history helps to project the powerful aura of that historic event to the present. Nwabueze understands that to some people, Aba Women’s Riot represents a defining moment in their history, hence it remains a relevant tool for socio-political galvanization of the masses, hence a powerful material for didactic metaphor. Therefore the entire story is a didactic metaphor which suggests that the masses power is more powerful than the government’s power. Apart from the entire play as didactic metaphor, Nwabueze clearly presents the major and minor conflicts as embodiments of didactic metaphors. Conflicts as didactic metaphors can be seen in the vagaries of political manoeuvrings amongst the warrant chiefs, squabbles amongst the rank and file of the market women, the confrontation between the market women and the Colonial Authority, and the mind-games between the Colonial Administrator and the warrant chiefs. Finally, in an engrossing manner Nwabueze shows how these conflicts are inter-connected, and how an action in life could instigate other actions, as way of re-emphasizing to the readers and audience about the contexts of realities in real life.

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