



SUSPENSE AND DIALOGUE AS ASPECTS OF AESTHETICS IN THE PLOT OF ELECHI AMADI'S TRILOGY

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ABSTRACT: *The greatness of Elechi Amadi in African literature in the divergent assessments of his literary creativity by significant critics over time is in his creative ability. Elechi Amadi's trilogy: The Concubine, The Great Ponds and The Slave demonstrate aptly his artistry. Suspense in the texts is made manifest in myths and worship of the gods. The trilogy embodies elements that are consequential to the African society and worldviews. Amadi's trilogy from various perspectives discuss the painful narrative of the spirit-husband myth as seen in The Concubine, inter-village conflict evidenced in the Great Ponds, and the wrath of the gods against Echela's family in The Slave. The purpose of this paper is to examine suspense and dialogue and how myths are consciously used to effect suspense in the mind of the reader of the texts. Consequently, dialogue by characters also reflects on the myths to create more suspense. This paper in its findings notes that Amadi magnifies the jealousy and anger of the gods over human beings as they must yield to the dictates of the supernatural forces. The aesthetics in the trilogy is on how Amadi successfully explores real and supernatural issues. The paper concludes that Amadi's trilogy is still relevant in contemporary Nigeria as people still believe in worship at the shrines. This paper recommends a cordial relationship among African traditional religious worshippers, Islam and Christianity for the purpose of unity, and also recommends more research effort on suspense and dialogue as suspects of aesthetics on Elechi Amadi's trilogy. This paper hinges on Dell Hyme's Ethnopoetic theory because of its focus on cultural elements in the society. This paper has made a unique contribution to theory, policy and practice.*

KEYWORDS: Suspense, Dialogue, Aspects, Aesthetics, Trilogy.



INTRODUCTION

The significance of a writer lies inexorably in the enduring irresolution of the degree of his successes or failures in the facts of his creativity. A writer's works approach the height of classics when at all times and in all places, they sustain significant criticism, if not about his themes and relevance, commitment to regional issues and problems about the universal values, truths, beauty and virtues which the works expose.

Some critics have reservations about the works of Elechi Amadi especially because of their seeming irrelevance to issues such as politics, the quest for revolutions and artistic documentations of the dynamism of historical forces that shape the destiny of Africa. Some others hail the "story-teller" as one of "our finest fabulists and a superb spinner of words" (Osofisan, 1994, p.34). Others still evaluate him as a great entertainer evidenced in that "riding behind the façade of a novel to launch a political assault is a prostitution of literature" (Amadi, 1974, p.36). Maduka corroborates this view of the master craftsman when he suggests in an attempt to responds to some structures against Amadi that:

The novel should not be used to directly call the reader's attention to unpleasant situations in society. The novelist should therefore pay attention to the points that make him a good story-teller. Some of these (for Amadi) are rooted in his objectivity, sincerity and sense of balance in present events (p.39).

Similarly, Palmer (1994), perhaps one of the most insightful critics of African literature in our times writes about Amadi and his works thus:

If Elechi Amadi's novels are perennially popular, it is largely because they give the ordinary reader the impression of neatness and compactness and if they do this, it is because Amadi takes considerable pains in his plot construction. It is difficult to think of another African novelist who is more expert at the construction of plot (p.48).

Accordingly, credit should be given to Elechi Amadi for achieving "literary and creative balance" in his novels: *The Concubine* (1966), *The Great Ponds* (1969), and *The Slave* (1978), which made up the trilogy. Wright (1973) observed that:

Elechi Amadi, in his first novel, *The Concubine* (1966), achieved balance that requires notice; largely, I think through his subjection of all other elements to the continuity and controlled irony of the narrative. Later in *The Great Ponds* (1969), there are times when he is very fine, as in the descriptions of Olumba's fear of the menacing uncertainties of the deity Ogbunabali (p.36).

Aristotle's early definition of plot as "the imitation of an action" and also as "the arrangement of the incidents" and indeed his insistence that a writer "should first sketch the general outline (of the plot) and then fill in the episodes and amplify in detail" (Holman, 1980, p.335) seem to be Amadi's great aspirations in his works. It seems that Amadi is the great entertainer through the use of the written word that he is, because of the beautiful plots of his novels. It is the causality, the logicity and the overall neatness of his plots that endear his novels to many. It is the plot more than any other aspect of his novel that enhances the readability, the lucidity and charm of his novels. Not



for him the sensational juggling and convolution of plot, not for him the supposed great and popular themes and not for him the experimentations in language use that sometimes clothe simple and enjoyable stories in the robe of obscurantism. For Amadi, there is a story to be told well even if it is only for the exposition of the essence and rhythm of real life.

The aesthetics in Amadi's works lie undeniably in his control and skillful connection of events and episodes so that the reader can easily see a beginning, a middle and an end (the important parts in Aristotle's conception of plot). They lie in the simplicity of his exposition and in the even tenor in which his narration flows. This paper agrees with Wright (1973) that Elechi Amadi achieved a considerable level of "balance" with the sustained literary elements and controlled irony that continued in his subsequent novels that followed his first novel. The paper is of the view that the author strikes more balance in suspense with Ihuoma, the protagonist in the novel for not allowing her know of her status as a goddess until such men as Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme die because of her. The disclosure of Anyika, the dibia to this effect was rather late. If she had known on time, she would have disclosed this status to all the men that had fallen in love with her. Inflicting her with such a stigma of "man-killer" without her knowledge was an aspect of suspense; this casts her in bad light by any estimation. In agreement with the aesthetics of Elechi Amadi's novels, Palmer (2009) has extolled the creative ingenuity of the author's plot pattern as follows: "...Amadi takes considerable pains in his plot construction. It is difficult to think of another African novelist who is more expert at the construction of plot" (p.48).

These credits emanate considerably from Amadi's ingenious use of two elements of a good plot suspense and dialogue. This paper argues that these enduring elements more than any other are "the points that make (Amadi) a good storyteller." They constitute Amadi's enduring aesthetics. Aesthetics, the assessment of the beautiful, the valuable and the appreciable in art, remains the index of ranking literary works and writers. Walter Peter, often considered the father of aestheticism, instructs us that:

To define beauty not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, not to find a universal formula for it, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of aesthetics (Peter, 1969, p.643).

Ultimately, it is the fact that a writer excels in the achievement of the goals of literature that gives him a place in the hierarchy of master craftsmen. Femi Osofisan calls Amadi "master of suspense" but fails to explore this assertion. Eustace Palmer identifies Amadi's supremacy in the presentation of dialogue and asserts about his novels that "a careful study of each novel would reveal that at least half consists of dialogue" (Palmer, 1969, p.71), as he passes along in a study of Amadi's art. This paper will essentially, through a study of Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966), *The Great Ponds* (1969), and *The Slave* (1978), explore the veracity of these claims. By providing adequate illustrations and examining the roles of these two elements in enhancing the success of Amadi's novels, it hopes to demonstrate that they are enduring aspects of Amadi's aesthetics.



Suspense in Amadi's Trilogy

Suspense is defined as “a sense of uncertainty or anxiety about the outcome of events in a story” (Safier et al., 1989, p.926). Holman (1980) defines it as:

the poised anticipation of the reader or audience as to the outcome of the events of a short story, a novel or drama particularly as these elements affect a character in the work for whom the reader or audience has formed a sympathetic attachment (p.434).

From all indications, the presence of the supernatural (gods) in Elechi Amadi's novels especially the trilogy speaks volumes of the aspect of suspense that offers a dynamic combination of allegory a conventional realism, which allows the mythical consciousness by means of individual myths, to understand and interpret the world of his novels. “Clearly, Amadi depicts his fictional universe in his trilogy as an intimidating *mysterium*, an utterly eerie space populated by awesome gods wielding enormous power” (p.138). By providing adequate illustrations and examining the roles of suspense and dialogue in enhancing the success of Amadi's novels, it hopes to demonstrate that they are enduring aspects of Amadi's aesthetics.

A quality of a good plot, suspense, is that excitement that keeps us reading a novel till we get to the end. It puts the reader in a perpetual quest for what happens next in a story. A story that lacks this element is unentertaining, unattractive, boring and ultimately unsatisfactory to the reader. What is going to happen to a character? How will a protagonist survive? What turn will the story take? There are some of the questions that flood the mind of a significant reader of a novel caught by the suspense in a novel. The reader is only satisfied and relieved from suspense when the story ends and many of his questions have been answered.

The great ingenuity of Amadi can be known from the depth of the readers' immersion in contemplating, for instance, the fate of Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme in *The Concubine* and in their conjecture Ihuoma would be at last. Hearts miss beats in sympathy as one obstacle after another is crossed. They beat loudly as readers long for the recovery of Emenike and later Ekwueme and as men contemplate the next option when Anyike, the dibia, announces the irrevocable nature of the bond of the sea god on Ihuoma, his wife. Heart beats regularize again when Agwoturumbe sees a way out and expectations rise as arrangements are made for the final sacrifice in the middle of the river and in middle of the night which will blind the sea king. The reader joins Ekwueme and Ihuoma in basking in the false assurance that all will be well, which precedes the death of Ekwueme, the final catastrophe from the fatal arrow shot by Nwona, Ihuoma's son, who is famous among his peers for his archery. Heartbeats rise to a crescendo here but the reader is recalled from his involvement when he realises that his sojourn has been in the world be fiction, in a world we enjoy only because of our willing suspension of disbelief.

In *The Great Ponds*, suspense is built around the customary period of six months after the oath, during which if Olumba lives, it will be known that the rich fish pond of Wangaba belongs to his village, Chiolu or if he dies, it will be known that it belongs to rival, Aliakoro. Virtually a mystical and mysterious process of establishing truth, this is a tradition that celebrates irrationality, one that enhances inordinate masculinity. Ultimately the novel is Amadi's effort to use a parable and an allegory to mock and castigate humanity for vain show of power over the control of resources



which God has benevolently placed at the disposal of man. Even while the effort here is to evaluate Amadi's use of suspense as a veritable element of literary aesthetics, it is important to remind critics of the political, moral and social relevance of this work. Mao Tse Tung suggests that "politics is war without bloodshed, while war is politics with bloodshed" (p.109). Amingo (1994) suggests in a study entitled "Amadi's *The Great Ponds* As a Tool for National Moral Education in Nigeria" that in the novel, Amadi:

has gone into the past to dig up a story that in concrete terms portrays the essentially negative and selfish tendencies of human beings everywhere. In essence, Amadi is dealing with issues of universal significance, such as human greed and selfishness. Since he experienced the civil war in Nigeria at the time the novel was published, one is tempted to conclude that the Chiolu-Aliakoro feud is an allegory of the civil war which was fought in Nigeria because of human greed, selfishness, naivety and irrationality (p.123).

Aminigo's interpretation applies even now as communities kill and maim members over who should control natural resources especially oil. A great literary work is a universal idiom that may well apply to the human condition, the ultimate subject of art, in all times and in all places. A man who writes to expose the futility of wars, to advocate peace and to rescue humanity from the vices that often plague it is relevant politically, morally, socially and indeed in all aspects of human endeavour. In fact, he is a revolutionary for who is one except he causes development and great changes in the way things are done.

Here lies the eternal value of literature such as that which Amadi writes. But suspense remains an important element of creativity in this work. How Chiolu will keep Olumba alive since the preservation of his life has become a community responsibility which is the centre of the suspense in the novel. The emotions, fears and anxieties of the reader race along with those of the people of Chiolu, rising in progression with Olumba's physical and psychological breakdown. When the wars are fought, we share in the anxieties of the citizens over which village will win and which will not, over which warriors will return home safely and which will not. Along with the people of Chiolu, we wish we could stop all the devices of Wago, the leopard killer, to play god and to ensure that Olumba dies, for we have formed a sympathetic attachment with Olumba for his altruism and patriotism.

We are relieved when, in frustration, Wago commits suicide by drowning in the Wangaba fish pond. But even before then, we worry over whether Olumba's wife, Oda and other women will be rescued from kidnappers. When Oda returns, Amadi keeps us in suspense over the woman's strange behaviour from which we are relieved only when we learn that kidnappers raped her. The readers are anxious to read about a successful peace accord by the warning villages but Amadi will like to stretch their emotions a little more. We almost reach cracking points when towards the end of the novel, Olumba begins his war with invisible and mysterious beings in the nights. We wonder where else Amadi is taking us to as a sick and wiling Olumba rises with unexpected vigour to defy and fight an enemy who at one time can be a man and at another a leopard.

A quotation of the narration here, even if with ellipses, is necessary in order to evoke sufficiently the suspense and surprise it brings to the reader:



He (Olumba) rose suddenly and made for the arena. Ikechi and his two friends kept a few paces behind him...Olumba walked on like a drunken man. Now and then, his steps faltered, but he always straightened up again...Suddenly, a huge grey shape leaped out of the bush and made straight for Olumba. The man groaned as his assailant bore him to the ground. A few bounds brought Ikechi and the others to the scene. They found Olumba in a desperate struggle with a huge spotted animal. "A leopard," Ikechi panted...There was a shriek as Eziho's machete found its mark. The animal relaxed its hold on Olumba and began to struggle free. Eziho's machete sank home for the second time. Mad with pain, the beast, wrenched itself free and disappeared with two bounds, leaving its skin behind... "There is only one man who could have done this," Diala said. "Wago the leopard killer," three people said simultaneously (Amadi, 1966, p.214).

Amadi does not drop his penchant for successful use of suspense in *The Slave*: the reader of Amadi's novel is indeed a "waiting reader." It is the reader's intimacy with the characters, his great sympathy and empathy for them that make the impact of the suspense in these novels extraordinary. From the time Olumati dramatically appears in the road of life and tells Enna "I am not a stranger" (p.9) till when he tells Ovunda, his relation almost at the end of the novel, "I have had enough company, I don't want any more," our emotions oscillate with his between the prospects of success and failure, between desire and accomplishment, between hope and despair and between faith for humanity and total resignation to fate and the gods.

Will Olumati survive his stigmatisation, establish his identity and live among his people? Will he ever propose to and marry Enna? Who will indeed marry Enna, a girl most desired by the most eligible bachelors in Alifi? Will Aso the braggart succeed in winning Enna because of his elegant and strong physique that makes him a champion wrestler? Will Nyeche change his mind and marry Enna as his father would wish? Will Olumati marry Adiba, a good girl who wants him inspite of his stigmatisation? These are some of the questions that worry the reader. Amadi stretches the reader's emotions mercilessly too far as he watches a good and virtuous girl, Adiba, pine away in love and desire for Olumati. When Adiba runs away from the torture one night after hanging the reader's mind in the balance briefly over whether she is alive or not, the reader is relieved that she is as wise as the best of her gender and has not made herself too cheap inspite of her great love for Olumati. It is part of the ironies in the novel that while Adiba will do everything to love and please Olumati, it is Wizo her brother who seals all the possibilities of Olumati's marriage to Enna and drives Olumati to abject frustration. Even at this point, Adiba is unflinching and she tells Olumati:

Olu, I am sorry...I am sorry...Olu, I know how you feel. You must forgive him...There is something you must know. I have been hesitating to tell you but I should do so now. It will save you much trouble and disappointment in future. You see...Many in Aliji are still not sure you are not a slave of Amadioha. I know you are not but people are stubborn (Amadi, 1978, p.156).

In the Adiba – Olumati – Enna love triangle and indeed in the Nyeche – Aleru beautiful example, one finds reasons to agree with Palmer (1994) when he writes:

The next aspect of Amadi's art that one would wish to highlight is his treatment of the theme of love...No other African novelist can rival him in the presentation of love. Ngugi is probably the only one who comes near with the portrayal of the Waiyaki-Nyambura affair in *The River Between*



and Mumbi-Gikoyo relationship in *A Grain of Wheat* and the Wanja-Karega affair in *Petals of Blood*...Amadi remains unrivaled in his presentation of the torments, anxieties, tortures, joys, uncertainties, frustrations and ecstasies that are part of being in love (p.49).

To expand the creative ingenuity of Amadi in aesthetics in *The Slave*, Eko (1991) states inter alia:

To define the word “slave” immediately raises deep and unparalleled problems because it calls for the resources of the historian, the philosopher, the theologian, the political economist, the literary man and so forth. The title of this novel is deliberately chosen to cast spell of doubt, suspicion and uncertainty on the novel’s protagonist. Slavery is a dreaded word, describing a total ownership of one person by another or by a god over human beings to endless generations (Pp.72-73).

In *The Slave*, neither Aso nor Olumati wins Enna’s hand in marriage after all. These two had physical, spiritual and emotional contests for Enna. The aborted fight between them is indeed a fight for Enna and beneath the joys of sports and competition is an actual wish and effort of each to win and possess Enna conclusively by show of superior masculine strength. Our hearts pound away as we watch to see who will win this contest. We worry over whether Olumatic’s mother will ever return to provide maternal care to a son and daughter who are wonderfully united in love and purpose to rebuild their family from the desolation which hatred, stigma and society’s stubbornness brought to it.

We are worried over what Olumati will do when his last bastion of strength, Aleru, a loved sister dies and indeed when Wizo betrays him and marries Enna. Indeed Amadi makes us wait in anxiety for long even in the matter of unraveling Olumati’s identity. The god’s answer in riddles on this matter increases suspense which remains the fine thread that holds together the different aspect of the novel. It links the causes and consequences. In short, it provides the unity and logic of plot.

Elechi Amadi in *The Slave* achieves an artistic unity by smoothly working out the various tensions within the story. The plot is logically structured to reflect the progressive rise of the conflict into a climax and final tragic denouement (Acholonu, 2003, p.8).

What else will suspense do in a story if not to keep the reader in the dark on issues until the novelist finds it convenient according to his purpose to release facts? How else does suspense operate if the writer does not allow the discerning reader some vague suspicion of his intention? What is considered helpful in a study of Amadi’s use of suspense is an examination of how Amadi achieves this element of plot in his works.

One way is sometimes to precede a cause with a consequence and at other times to precede a consequence with a cause. In each case, the reader is left to keep speculating on the way things will go. Sometimes also Amadi fills his stories with strange and inexplicable events and actions. Wago, the leopard killer, for instance, in *The Great Ponds*, cut off the edge of Olumba’s cloth. This is a cause or realm for the serious illness Olumba goes through. The appearance of the brightly coloured snake, the death of the bird, the entry of a wild tortoise into Olumba’s reception hall, the appearance of an owl and viper and indeed the spider that lets itself down hangs at Diali’s eye level (*The Great Ponds*, p.156) are ominous incidents that accentuate the suspense in the novel.



Sometimes, Amadi builds up suspense by setting the reader in quest of fulfillment of an expectation. He could create suspense through a surprising twist that either delays or nullifies a human preposition. When we are about rejoicing over Chiolu's ownership of the fish pond especially as Olumba has survived the six months, we learn that it has been desecrated and no man can again fish in it. This is because the evil man, Wago, out of pain and conscious of imminent death from machete cuts commits suicide in it (The Great Ponds, p.217).

Amadi also originates and sustains suspense through the use of characters who are obsessed with their quests; their inordinate positions on issues stretch the suspense in the story. For instance, Ekwueme must marry Ihuoma. Olumba must win the war against Aliakoro while Wago must win against Chiolu. Olumati must establish his identity and build a home in Aliji. He must marry Enna and not any other girl, including Adiba, the good virtuous but limping girl. If Amadi is "a master of suspense," he is a genius in the use of dialogue. Mendilow (1967) suggests that dialogue in fiction strengthens the illusion of presentness. "It produces an effect similar to that fact in the theatre where the spectator is indeed present, though as far as the play is concerned he is assumed not to be there at all" (p.277).

The passage where Ekwueme first attempts to declare his love for Ihuoma is an apt example of a good dialogue.

The passage perfectly describes the fumbling attempts of an immature and sensitive young man to express his love for a woman he really considers superior. The lyrical quality of their relationship after Ekwueme's madness is itself a hint that it cannot last; it is too idyllic and the all-powerful sea-gods' vengeance in having Ekwueme accidentally killed by an arrow, is a logical not an illogical climax (Palmer, 1972, p.125).

Dialogue in Amadi's Trilogy

The significant writer has always found dialogue useful in advancing the action in the story in a definite way. Dialogue is used especially in bringing out important actions forcefully especially when important decisions are taken. It extols over summary and reportage as aspects of "showing" for it makes impression more valid, more truthful and more vivid. Dialogue gives the impression of naturalness. It makes the reader feel that he is participating in the action, especially as he hears about it as it is going on, exactly as it occurs and at the moment it occurred. Dialogue identifies characters, their social positive and special interests. It presents in a natural way an interplay of ideas and opinions during conversations. In turn, conversations reveal the temperaments, thoughts, feelings and personalities of characters. Here is part of the conversations between Ihuoma and her mother:

"Kaka, do you think that the fight caused his death?" Ihuoma asked in an undertone.

"What else caused it?"

"I thought it was lock-chest"

"But what brought about the lock-chest?"



“He worked too hard in the rain”

“Was that the first time he had worked under rain? No my child; we know what happened to him. Amadioha will kill them one by one” (Amadi, 1966, p.27).

Dialogue is the novelist’s best way of “showing” instead of “telling” and of introducing all illusion of immediacy and presentness. It increases readability, enhances the understanding of the novel and therefore its enjoyment. It seems that Palmer (1994) provides a justification for this paper when he writes of Amadi’s use of dialogues thus:

The creation of convincing, realistic dialogue is not as easy as some might suppose...To create dialogue which convinces the reader that this is truly the way in which people in a particular situation would converse, which displays the various idiosyncrasies and qualities of the characters and even suggests their status and the relationships between them, which enhances the plot and highlights the themes; this is the work of a consummate craftsman...Indeed Amadi’s instinct seems to be for dialogue rather than summary or narrative (p.51).

Similarly, Worugji (2006) could not have captured the slave any better than she did in a concise manner to describe Enna’s kind of slavery via the dialogue in the novel, thus: “Enna of Amadi’s *The Slave*, the authorial voice informs us that on the final day of Mgbede ceremony, Wizo The Carver emerged as the winner of all suitors...” (Pp.93-108).

Indeed, it could be said that the use of dialogue gives Amadi’s works a distinction in African literature. Barring the formal naming of characters, Amadi’s novels sometimes read like plays. His greater credit lies even more in his ability to realistically make dialogue, an instrument by which conversational goals are achieved whether they are to convince, convict, apologise to condemn a character or indeed to declare an intention. A few illustrations will suffice. The first is from *The Concubines*. Ekwueme, Wakiri, Nnadi, Mgbachi and Ihuoma are returning from the job of tying up Ihuoma’s yams on stakes. The three other men go home while Ekwueme makes a detour and comes back to Ihuoma’s compound and the following dialogue ensues:

“Ekwe, I hope you will stay for the evening meal,” Ihuoma ventured, not knowing what else to say.

“Yes, if you want me to,” he mumbled absent-mindedly.

“You worked so hard today. Thank you.”

“That is nothing. I wish I could do more” (p.89-92).

In this dialogue of five pages, Ekwueme and Ihuoma consider seriously the implications of a possible marriage. Ihuoma tells Ekwueme: “I am too old for you. You would soon grow tired of me. My children would be constant burden on you. No Ekwe, I don’t want to spoil your life.” Each “move”, the minimal interactive unit in discourse, which Ekwueme makes exhibits a cautionless aggression of a great lover. Ihuoma’s moves are relationalisations that test Ekwueme’s seriousness and sincerity. The speakers respect themselves in taking turns as we expect from lovers. The dialogue is natural and adequate and the “transactions”, exchanges that relate to the same generally.



Amadi is at his best as he stays away and does not intrude. Such is the virtue of good use of dialogue.

When the people of Chiolu go to Aliakoro for negotiations, we see another beautiful dialogue: It is in chapter 6 of *The Great Ponds*. Four Chiolu women had been kidnapped. Chituru is the head of the team from Chiolu while Eze Okehi leads the team from Aliakoro. Chituru got up to speak:

“Men of Chiolu who use fish for firewood, terrors of the forests, hunters with invisible footprints, greater sons of great fathers, I greet you.” Chiolu shouted lustily. “Men of Aliakoro, growers of big yams, leopard killers, eyes of the night, eight-headed warriors, I greet you!” The response shook the reception hall.

“Eze Okehi”, Chituru went on, “we have come to take our women who are snatched away from us last night. Isn’t it true that we don’t do violence to women with children....”

Okehi cleared his throat and replied:

“Chituru, I shall not waste your time. You have a long way to travel. Your village has established a precedence for this type of thing. What man does not know, he learns from neighbours. You will pay four hundred manillas for each woman.”

“Eze Okehi, I understand how you feel....”

“Eze Okehi,” Chituru opened up, “we have decided not to pay any ransom because these women were stolen and not captured in war. If you will hand them over to us we shall leave now. If you don’t, we shall leave all the same....” “That is the tradition.” Okehi agreed. (Pp.59-62). The elder of two warring villages are negotiating the release of captives. Each side is conscious of the consequences of breaking turns in the dialogue. Each speaker weighs sufficiently the implications of the retort from the other side before making another “move”.

The speech begins characteristically with the address form in which praise names and epithets of each village are cautiously repeated. It does not matter whether an insult would have been more appropriate. Formality in rhetoric is important here and gnomic expressions are appropriately used. Consultations heed now and again to ensure that a speaker reflects the consensus opinion of his group as weighty decisions are taken. When it seems an agreement has been reached, the mode of operation is further defined. Protocol is observed for any breach may prove offensive. The statuses and ages of speakers are decipherable in the decorum they exhibit and in the traditional speech forms they use. This is unlike the situation when friends banter and “talk into other’s talk as we find in the dialogue between Nnenda and Ihuoma in *The Concubine* (Pp.77-79) or when Ekwueme and friends: Wakiri, Nnadi and Mgbachi banter as they tie Ihuoma’s yams on stakes” (*The Concubine*, Pp.87-89).

In *The Slave*, Amadi maintains these elements of dialogue that perfectly suit his dialogues to his artistic purpose. We illustrate with the dialogue between Enaa and Aso when Aso visits her in Mgbede. It is in chapter 12 of the novel.



Even before the dialogue, we are not in any doubt that Aso is an overbearing, overconfident braggart. He talks to Oriji about Enaa, his sister with condescension:

“Oriji, you are my friend”

“Mm. No need to say it”

“My family has given you hints about our intention towards Enaa”

“Mm”

“You have not given an answer because we have not made a normal approach”

“That is true”

“We intend to start serious negotiations”

“That is good”

“But before that I want to speak to Enaa seriously”

“Correct”

“I know you are on my side”

“Very much so”

“I am glad.”

Aso meets Enaa conversing with two girls. Aso sits down, eyes the young girls and discourteously begins a conversation. The girls become uncomfortable. Aso makes egoistic statements, a far more relevant part of the dialogue that runs for chapters in the novel where used. Aso finally interrogates Enaa thus:

“Whom will you marry; you stupid girl? Can’t you recognise a good thing? Well, we are together in this village; I shall not die today or tomorrow. I shall see that paragon of your...” (p.87).

Enaa’s responses and “moves” reveal her wit, her intelligence and indeed her romantic nature which make her more desirable to men.



CONCLUSION

Amadi therefore in the trilogy uses suspense and dialogue to build aesthetics in the plots of his novels to great advantage. They are his devices for traversing large compasses of actions, for exposing his characters, for building some intimacy between the characters and the reader and for clothing his story in an invaluable presentness. Amadi's novels especially the trilogy are undeniably significant works that have made invaluable contributions to African literature in theme and vision. These are enduring aspects of aesthetics in Amadi's novels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that having observed the thrust and efficacy of the use of suspense and dialogue as aspects of aesthetics in the plot of Elechi Amadi's trilogy and other novels, every novelist should strive to incorporate the same style and improve on it. It is worthy of mention that the use of these aspects in a literary work allows for the involvement of the reader in the entire development of the novel which he/she automatically becomes an active participant. It is believed that in doing this, literature will mount societal pressure on the reader, a literature that asserts its right to plot a new script from build-up to denouement.

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