Analysis of Onyekaonwu's *Nwata Rie Awọ* Using a Moralistic Approach

Juliet Ifunanya Okeyika
Department of Igbo, African & Asian Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
ji.okeyika@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract
One of the importance of literature is that it teaches morals and inculcates lessons and values to the readers who are changers of the society. Some critics verbalize that the play *Nwata Rie Awọ* is a tragic story spawned from infatuation not love, felt by the protagonist. However the playwright portrayed this play as a tragic 'love' story with several themes put in one. This paper will analyse the above mentioned play, using a Moralistic Approach to evaluate the ethical issues being shown and different lessons it could provide and this was done using sociological theory. This research adopted the descriptive qualitative method. The instrument used was the Igbo drama called *Nwata Rie Awọ* by Onyekaonwu, G.O. Findings made from this research showed that morals have been obscured in recent times and that free choice is important but people ignore the fact that choices have consequences. This research will be of importance to literary scholars who will embark on moralistic approach research on literary texts.

Key words: Moralistic Approach, Literature, Drama, *Nwata Rie Awọ*

Introduction

Literature is generally classified into three groups namely; drama, prose and poetry. It is used to describe things that are creative in writing to more technical or scientific works. Risdianto (2011:5) said that "Literature has important role that it plays in human life". This means that it has given much of entertainment, inspiration, information, motivation and so on.

Drama is a branch of literature presented in a dialogue form to be performed on stage. It is called *Ejije* in the Igbo language. This definition falls in line with Mbah et-al (2013: 186), which they stated "as a play written for actors to perform".

The Moral approach to literary criticism is the oldest form of approach known as historical. This conforms to the name associated with the novelist from the classical era. The novelist was primarily referred to as a moralist. Plato championed this idea in his *Ideal Republic* by assessing the level of moral effects exerted by the poet. The concern of this approach has been that literature importance is not ordinarily in the way it says things, but also in what it says.

Moral according to Bertens (2005:4), "is a word derived from Latin "mos" (Moris), meaning custom, habitual norms, values and role of life". He stated that one perspective on the development of morality is that it entails on the construction of judgements about justice, cooperation and equality. In line with his theoretical general approach, Piaget proposed that children's moral development stems from their reciprocal interactions with other including adult and peers. Current trends in literary analysis have tended towards two directions. The first is that which follows the critical approaches of renowned and influential critics. The second is the pursuit of theories, which aims at providing the readers with a set of concepts from which the study of literature may be grasped. The two conditions make literary criticism possible. They are the presence of

the genius and a fertile environment. The environment here, includes a current of true and fresh ideas. This means that the function of literary criticism is to find and articulate such current of ideas. Mbah and Mbah (2007: 394) thus conform to this and say that "literary criticism has an important role to play in the generation of great literature".

A Moralistic Approach according to More (1987), "is a literary criticism which will discriminate literature between the false and true, the deformed and normal; preachers of harmony and proportion and order, prophets of the religion taste". The definition above emphasizes that it is the critic's duty to determine the moral tendency of literary works and judge them on that basis. To a layman, a moralistic approach is concerned with the content and values of the literary piece. This means that in using a moralistic approach to scrutinize the play, the critic will introduce the characters who played the vital roles and their attributes that effectively disport the play's themes and also will divulge some ethical issues present in the play and the author's implication for showing those issues and judging literary works by their ethical teachings and by their effects on readers. In this paper, the selected text for analysis is *Nwata Rie Awọ* and a moralistic approach would be used.

Purpose of this Research

Concerning the previous problem, the purpose of this research is to analyse the Igbo drama *Nwata Rie Awọ* using a moralistic approach.

Synopsis of *Nwata Rie Awọ*

Nwata Rie Awọ is a hundred paged Igbo drama book written by G.O. Onyekaonwu. It is a story of strong man called Aworo who is an undefeatable wrestler in his own time. He is the son of Obidike and Nwamgbogo. He married Obioma who gave him a daughter called

Odinchefu. After some years of his marriage with her, he starts seeing faults in her and fabricates reasons why he wants her out of his life. He accuses her falsely of trying to poison him and this led to her and their daughter Odinchefu banished and sold into slavery. After many years, Aworo marries another woman and unfortunately for him it was his daughter that he married. Some many years of childlessness exposed the history to him. When it was made clear to him and his 'second wife' of what happened in the past as a result of which his first wife Obioma returned, Aworo committed suicide because he couldn't withstand the tensity of his abominable acts which are; false accusations, kidnapping, selling his wife and daughter to slavery, marrying his daughter (though unknowingly), putting his own daughter in a family way and facing his wife Obioma.

Moralistic Approach of Onyekaonwu's *Nwata Rie Awọ*

Moral critics believe that the larger purpose of literature is to teach morality and to probe philosophical issues. A moral theory explains why a certain action is wrong and provides the framework upon which one thinks and discusses in a reasoned way and evaluates specific moral issues.

Moralistic approach is useful when considering the themes of works and does not view literature merely as "art" isolated from all moral implications rather it recognizes that literature can affect readers, whether subtly or directly and that the message of the work and not just the decorous vehicle for that message is important.

Analysis of Aworo and Obioma Characters in *Nwata Rie Awọ* using Moralistic Approach

In the case of *Nwata Rie Awọ,* the author portrayed Aworo as the protagonist and a strong warrior who was undefeatable. He was also

portrayed as one who fights for his people, was sociable and accommodated friends. He participated and always had the interest of his people at heart. This was seen when Obidike told him of how arrogantly a warrior from another village bragged that he will defeat his people.

> Aworo: … ị sị na ọ bụ onye na-atatọgharị ọnụ ahụ?
> Duru: A sịrị na ọ bụ Akatosi nke Amaudele.
> Aworo: Gaa kaara Eze na anụla m ozi o ziri, na nsogbu adịghị.
> Ya zighachiri Akatoosi na ndị Amaudele ozi sị ha na ha emeteela agụ n'ụra
> (Pg 23-24)

i. Claims on forced marriage resulting in lack of love:

Aworo lived his life like any other man; got married and bore a daughter through his wife (a woman he claimed he married on duress). To him, the woman in question forced herself on him and he married her just to please her people and his parents too. This was his claim for not loving his wife Obioma but in the above drama, it was shown, seen, read and believed by the readers that the said Aworo paid the bride price of the said Obioma who he claimed forced herself on him by himself. Nobody did the bride price making for him. He sought for her hand in marriage.

> Aworo: …nne na nna m ekwetago na mụ ga-alụ Obioma…
> Ọ bụrụ na unu ekweta, ọ ga-**asọ** anyị ịbịa echi wee mee ihe gbasara alụm nwaanyị.
> (Pg 52)

In the above illustration, the bolded word *asọ* means 'like' in English language. In view of that and since those utterances were

made by him, Aworo has no moral justification to claim that his marriage with Obioma was 'forced' and as result should not be expected to be a long lasting marriage. During his interview with Okwukogu (his supposed father-in-law), he affirmed to the fact that he wanted to marry Obioma.

Okwukogu: Gwa m, ị chọrọ ịlụ ya?
Aworo: …a chọ m ka m lụọ ya. (Pg 53)

Walter (2008) said that, "being responsible is to have control and authority over something or someone and the duty of taking care of it or them". From the drama mentioned above, Aworo as an individual couldn't control himself of whatever feelings he had for Obioma. His said feelings could be termed 'infatuation' and not love that could lead to marriage. Thus, he proceeded and married her without really defining his feelings and instead of admitting that, blamed the situation to Obioma and termed her a 'cheap woman' who pushed herself to him and forced him to marry her. Again, he couldn't control the situation in his family thereby mismanaging it which eventually led to a disastrous outcome.

ii. Settling for a Second Wife for 'Real' Marriage and Love

There are questions that are raised when analysing a literary work moralistically and they are; Was the character's actions by his or her own decision? What influenced the character? What were the intentions? Did the ends justify the means? Did the character make the right choice?

It is believed in the Igbo adage that death is that which kills someone when life seems interesting. Aworo laid false accusation against his wife, claiming that she wants to poison him. He sprinkled whitish powdered substance on the food Obioma brought

for him and raised alarm that his wife wanted to poison him. This singular act raised dust and brought banishment on the side of Obioma and her daughter, Odinchefu. It did not end there, as Aworo went ahead with the help of some boys, kidnapped her and her daughter and sold them out.

In the long run and as nemesis could catch up on Aworo, he remarried after several years of selling Obioma and Odinchefu to slavery and this time, he married his own daughter unknowingly. This time around, he wanted a normal, working and lasting marriage. In view of the approach which is used for the analysis, Aworo has no moral right whatsoever to expect or enjoy a peaceful marriage void of misfortunes when compared to his animalistic behaviour in his past marriage. He ate his cake and wanted to have it back again without knowing that what goes around surely in one way or another must come around. In his own case, his after several years of committing atrocity, his sins came knocking on his face.

To justify the questions raised above, Aworo's decision was not influenced by anyone. He harboured it in his heart for a long time and waited for the opportunity and the right time to execute his devilish plans. His intention was to make sure that Obioma leaves his life at all cost not minding what happens to her, the repercussion of his actions and how she and her daughter feel. The outcome of his decision justified the means and his decision was never the best kind of decision.

iii. Infatuation

Infatuation means a foolish and usually extravagant passion or love or admiration. Obioma in the drama *Nwata Rie Awọ,* was of victim of this such. She brought unending problem upon herself and her actions served as an eye opener to womanhood. What she felt for

Aworo was never love. Her decision to marry Aworo was as a result of his wrestling strength and nothing more. She allowed her emotions to control her and thus made her think she was doing the right thing.

She rejected suitors on several occasions because her emotions pushed her around. Aworo on the other hand saw that as on opportunity to say that she forced herself on him. This thus made her to be a disgrace to womanhood. When it comes to marriage in the Igbo society, a man comes after a woman he wants to marry and not the other way round. As in the case of Obioma, she ran to Aworo's house even before her bride price was paid. This probably is the main reason why he saw her as being 'cheap'. Such act is not acceptable in the Igbo society.

> Aworo: …nke mbụ bụ ịkọrọ gị na nwa gị nwaanyị bụ Obiọma gbatara ọsọ na be anyị…
> (Pg 52)

In view of the above, Obioma shouldn't have expected anything less from Aworo's behaviour. A man is supposed to make his choice when it comes to marriage to avoid incrimination.

iv. Self-Destruction

Suicide is an act of self-destruction and the act of killing oneself is termed 'suicide'. It is a crime to commit suicide and never an option. Aworo in this drama committed suicide when he couldn't withstand the negative outcome of his actions. His past and present lives started hunting him in his presence. As brave and courageous as he posed to be, he should be in best position to withstand any weather, be it good or bad. He should be bold enough to tackle what he started and fight to finish.

As regards his suicidal decision and action, what he did was actually inhuman, but there are other ways to handle the situation; like seeking solution from soothsayers, cleansing the land in order to appease the gods. By doing so, man, human and gods will be appeased. This is in line with the adage which says that 'it won't be long that a situation is termed so bad, it becomes good'.

Summary and Conclusion

This research is hoped to help the reader learn more moral values and apply them in his or her daily life. The research adopts descriptive qualitative method which analysed the selected literary text using a moralistic approach and allows the researcher to describe a phenomenon by presenting the facts in rich details without attempting to interpret them. According to Kenny (in Nurgiyantoro, (2010:320), "moral as well as a theme, in terms of the content of literary works dichotomy forms, is an element of the content". This implies that it is something to be conveyed by the author to the reader. In fact, it will be better for the reader to understand about literature before reading a drama, since drama is one of the familiar literary works to anyone. Drama can be enjoyed by anyone at any age with suitable and interesting story in it. Moreover, it is also important to understand the moral values in the drama because they make the reader application in lives and the society at large.

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