

A Lie That Tells The Truth: Reader's Perspective Of Igbo Fiction

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Abstract

Igbo novels are works of art that evolve from imaginative revelations of the past age, the present age, or even the future age. Today, so many Igbo works of fiction are floating in society as scholars strive to preserve the language through Igbo literature. Yet, these works of fiction are not in any way cherished by some native speakers of the language or attract wide readership and appreciation, unlike English novels. The objectives of this study are therefore to acquaint people especially the Igbo that there is the truth about life wrapped up in Igbo fiction. Such truth will give people more memorable insight into the secondary world created by Igbo novels. The reader-response theory was adopted against the traditional, formalistic, and biographical approaches to literary appreciation. Related literature was reviewed. This is qualitative research that adopted the descriptive survey method to attain the goals of the study. Three persons (readers) were given the novels: Erimma, Ukpaka Okpoko Buuru, and Uru Nwa, to read to elicit their responses about Igbo fiction (novels). Similarly, written questions were given to them in respect of the novels read. Their written responses were collected and analyzed. The findings of the work proved that fiction is a reflection of reality and the readers to some reasonable extent are the creation or production of the meaning of a text. A text is complete only when it is read and the reader contributes his part in synthesizing the gaps left in the narrative by the author. The writer, therefore, suggests that scholars and teachers of Igbo literature should be aware of the shift away from interpreting literary work from the author's perspective to the reader's perspective thus enhancing the contributions of the readers in the story world.

Introduction

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Literature is a form of art that shares with other arts the quality of representation. As a form of art, literature is a reasonable quantity of material written through imagination and the beautiful creation of words. This art form is usually created amongst others to provide enjoyment, entertainment, information, education, and excitement to the reader or audience when the readers come in contact with the text.

Literature is divided into three genres; prose, drama, and poetry. These three types of literature in their unique structures enhance the reader's knowledge of life as represented. Prose, drama, and poetry are distinguished from one another by their mode of structure. The prose is written in a narrative style, the drama in dialogue, and the poetry in verse.

Fiction is an account or story by an author that is not true. The story in a novel, drama, or even poetry could be made up, invented, or fashioned by the writer. This

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explanation by some people affects the way they appreciate literature. As such, they do not take the stories they read seriously as actual accounts. Narratives like *Erimma*, *Ukpama Okpoko Buuru*, and *Uru Nwa* may appear to a reader as mere fables. Most people assume that what is real is only when they have direct apprehension of the object or fact at hand. Therefore, to such people, literary stories are not fact or reality. Even though fiction is a book and story about imaginary people, events, and places, still it helps us to make sense of the world we know and do not know.

Their contents are true to human nature and this makes them real. This is to say, that our access to reality is based on fiction rather than fact. We understand something, only when we tell ourselves a story about it. By this, it may mean that fiction is inherently truer than fact and that what is regarded as fact is good fiction, which we consider most reasonable to accept. This is because what one believes in him is what he regards as true. This is to say, that sense of reality is inherent and not outward. The reality of fiction is an irony of interest; a lie that tells the truth. This is so because stories are told by authors/writers out of their life experiences, background, or situations operational in the world around and beyond. Writers do not create their works in a vacuum. They employ devices to make their stories fictional by adding or subtracting some elements in their stories. Onuekwusi (2013:7) in his explanation about literature says that:

... literature is art and art speaks remote truth. Literature is a crystallization of man's aspiration to create through words a reality a second handle on existence not different from what the world has given but that which helps man to understand and make sense of the world. The shortness of life and indeed the many engagements man has in his lifetime constrain him to find other ways of knowing fully the world and the people in their likes, dislikes, and experiences and to learn from these. Literature becomes therefore a slice of life that provides curious man with vicarious knowledge of aspects of life which he could not have known and to subsequently use this to have a more fulfilled life...

Looking at the above explanation of what Literature is, one will now believe that fiction (Literature) is a mirror of life or reality. Igbo novels are part of this mirror that one uses to see oneself and the world around him. Writers of Igbo novels have always lived in the society where they create these works. They give an account of war, crime, poverty, love, fame, adventure, culture, history, religion, etcetera.

In the course of narration, the writers assume that a reader has background knowledge of the environment or the society, perhaps, about the history of their village, town, or city, about the kind of thing that happens every day. Therefore, in the story, the author expects the reader to fill in gaps in the narrative with relevant facts about the world. In this sense, the writer adds or subtracts some items in his story, making it fictional but at the same time believing that the reader sees with him the truth of his story. This expectation in turn makes the story realistic on the part of the reader. This is because the reader, in the course of interpreting the text based on his personal experience, somehow accepts the truth in the novel. That is the effect of verisimilitude on the reader.

The act of reading is like a dialogue between the reader and the text. The text has meaning only when the two (text and reader) are joined in the conversation. This implies that the role of the text is redefined from an independent object into something that can only exist when it interacts with the mind of the reader. Therefore the reader takes an active role instead of a passive role while reading a text. This type of role by the reader is usually manifested while reading realistic novels.

Goring, Howthorn, and Mitchell (2010:414) say that realist literary works are typically so-called because they are believed to be in some way like life. "A realist novel involves a correct – reflection of the totality of a society – totality both in terms of its structure and importantly its movements and inner forces".

This is true of Igbo novels which give an account of the situation around the world of the Igbo and beyond. Such novels include *Erimma* – Tagboo Nzeakor. *Ukpama Okpoko Buuru* – Tony Ubesie, *Uru Nwa* – Maduekwe, J.C.; *Omenuko* – Pita Nwana, *Mgbe Nkita Ga-Anwu* – Donatus N. Epuchie, *Ndidi Amaka* – Lawrence C. Okoro, *Ulo ka Njo* – Benedict Igboke and many others. These novels give an account of real-life situations as much as they are fiction.

Given the foregoing, therefore, one can see that Igbo prose fictions are also a narrative used to entice the reader into some deeper than a circumstantial sense. It is on this premise that the writer wants to apply the reader–response approach in analyzing those Igbo novels which appear true to life situations using facts and details from ordinary life to produce the illusion of reality. Fiction in this work, therefore, could be seen as an

imagination (lie) that tells the truth about life. Therefore, the perspective of the reader is paramount in this work to ascertain the level of truth in Igbo fiction (literary lie). It is necessary to look into the reader's mind or consider the position of the reader and what transpires as he or she reads the lines of the Igbo text. It may be interesting to know that the response of the reader is relevant to understanding a text and should be used as the focus of approaching a work of literature especially, Igbo novels, hence, the consideration of the reader's perspective on Igbo fiction.

Most times readers appreciate fictional stories in a text. It makes them think, laugh, cry, hate, work hard, love, and change attitudes or habits. Fiction challenges readers to react to situations. This fact presents fiction as a "reality" (true) yet it is fashioned by its author. Igbo novels project this art of reality. But evidence shows that most times, readers of Igbo novels receive them as an object to be studied and not as an experience to live through. The hub of this study, therefore, is on establishing that though Igbo novels are fictional, they are expressions of stack realities of experience and need to be appreciated by readers. Therefore, the focus should be shifted from how the author developed the ideas on the pages of a text to how the reader receives the literary work so that the text should have a complete meaning.

This study specifically tried to examine the realities of Igbo novels despite their fictional nature. It went further to appreciate characters in Igbo novels; how they think, feel, and live just like the actual people in life. It also found out how the interaction between a reader and a text creates the meaning of a text (novel) and finally, the extent to which literary works on Igbo novels have considered the response of readers.

Reader-response or Receptionist theory is interested in the reader's interaction with the text as central to interpretation. This theory is of the view that a work of literature cannot exist as a separate, closed entity. The reader has an essential contribution to the text. Authors believe that the reader lives in the same society as them, therefore they leave gaps that readers must fill in drawing on their own experiences and knowledge. This implies that a reader has his contributions and interpretations to make.

It is believed that this study will encourage readers to take Igbo novels seriously as they will appreciate Igbo novels as reality. It will help people to know what exists that they do not know that it exists, which is embedded in Igbo novels. This study will as well be invaluable to the authors. It will encourage them to produce our writing more interesting novels that will expose real-life events.

The Novel and Realism

The novel has no one form of definition. This problem arises when we try to distinguish a novel from some other forms of prose narrative such as a short story, a fable, an allegory, a biography, and an autobiography. According to Holeman (1972) cited by Njoku (2010:64).

The term novel is used in its broadest sense to designate any extended fictional prose narratives. In practice, however, its use is customarily restricted to narratives in which the representation of character occurs either in a static condition or in the process of development as a result of events or actions. Often the term implies that some organizing principle – plot or theme or idea – should be present in a narrative that is called a novel.

This means that the novel is a story created by an author with real or fictional characters. They are created in a way that they appear "life-like". This implies the achievement of verisimilitude in a literary work.

Quoting Duruaku (2008), Njoku continues; "a novel is a creative writing in prose, of quite some length and complexity which attempts to reflect and express human experience or conduct. The work may create the illusion of reality..." This assertion is true because a novel is a work of creativity that reflects the human experience and presents characters that may be real or imagined. The author designs the story to represent his perception of what goes on in society.

Explaining further about the novel, Onuekwusi (2008:66-67) enumerated the meaning of a novel as follows:

1. The novel is a story in prose. The prose is its appropriate style because it needs wide latitude to accommodate the results of philosophical, scientific, and intellectual scrutiny of a perception of life rather than an emotional and lyrical one.
2. The novel is an aesthetic narration in prose. The prose shares the quality of being aesthetic with other

genres of literature. Beauty or aesthetics in the novel is derived from the aptness of diction, the vividness of descriptions, the suitability of images and other literary devices used, and ultimately the appropriate combination of elements of fiction – plot, setting, characterization, theme, and technique – to produce an organic whole.

3. The novel is an imaginative creation. It derives its materials ultimately from real life. But it is fiction and it is only true because its content is true to human nature. It is imagination that mediates the facts of human existence as contained in History, sociology, anthropology, etc. to produce fiction. While the novel is built on social facts, it is a fabrication and ultimately a product of imagination.
4. The novel is a picture of real life. It is sometimes too close to real life. A picture reveals so much but not all that we need to know. So it is with the novel. In the novel, we see patterns, events, actions, and people we can find in life. But life sometimes defies patterns. This is why it is said that sometimes life is stronger than fiction.
5. The novel has coherence due to the plot or some kind of scheme. The defining principle of this coherence is causality.
6. The author of a novel has a setting that defines and conditions actions and characters. Setting confers realism in a narrative.
7. Actions and characters in a novel are located in definable and particular times and spaces that influence and modify them.
8. The novel is about men and women of all classes and distinctions. Its language is the ordinary language of men and women and its purpose is to fulfill a man. The novel is a record of man's history. Over the years are slight changes in its nature as it strives to accommodate the dynamism of man in society.
9. In the novel, the author's interpretation of reality is usually a particular perspective or point of view that derives from a theory of life he subscribes to. The interpretation may be moralistic, Marxist, feminist, formalistic, sociological, or archetypal.
10. The novel is dynamic and not static. Its great aspiration is to be new and real all the time. Its newness and reality derive from man's ever-changing sensibilities, his perception of himself, and indeed the human condition. In a bid to accommodate newness and reality, the novel responds to evolving literary aesthetics which in turn determine the criticism and evaluation of the novel.

In the above descriptions of the novel, the recurring phrase prominent as one could see is "novel and reality". A realistic novel unlike a romance is a fictional attempt to give the effect of realism. This is achieved by representing complex characters with missed motives that are rooted in a social class, operate in a developed social structure, interact with many other characters, and undergo plausible everyday modes of experience.

The realistic novel focuses on other customs, conversations, and, ways of thinking and valuing the upper social class. Igbo novels like *Ọmenụkọ Ụkpana Okpoko Buuru*, *Ndidi Amaka*, *Nkem EjeeAmerika*, *Ije Odumodu Jere*, *Iwe Nwanne Anaghị Eru n'Okpukpu*, *Mgbe Nkita ga-Anwu* etcetera are all realistic novels because they reflect or imitate real-life situations. This informed the choice of the novels selected for this article because they are all realistic novels.

Realism in Igbo novels could happen when the reader transfers his measuring apparatus for appreciating fallacies in Igbo folktales to that of appreciating fallacies in works of modern prose narrative in Igbo. This is because most modern works of prose fiction emerged from folktale narratives.

Okoye and Okoye (2009:83) have it that "a folktale is always tailored to illustrate an aspect of wisdom, even though the context is one of entertainment and pleasure. Although it is traditional and archetypal, at times it outshines its garment of local colors and radiates into spheres of universal truth. The truth of fiction is what the writer refers to as "A lie that tells the truth".

Achebe (1978) in Olaniyan and Quayson (2009:114) agrees with the truth of fiction or the realistic power of novel when he says

the fiction which imaginative literature offers us is not like... it does not enslave; it liberates the mind of man. Its truth is not like the cannons of orthodoxy or the irrationality of prejudice and superstition. It begins as an adventure in self-discovery and ends in wisdom and humane conscience.

Features of Narrative Fiction (*Erimma; Ukpana Okpoko Buuru; and Uru Nwa*)

Narrative fiction could be described as a literary technique that a literary artist uses in telling real stories about people's lives. Sometimes, the artist hides at the back of his story to tell stories about his own family life and himself as well. Mbah and Mbah (2007:240) put it this way:

In its very elementary sense, it is a presentation of social reality whose function is to constantly keep the social system in control, albeit towards a particular direction of development. These elements of social control and development are inculcated in the law, religion, politics, and, the economy of the people.

Mbah's definition of fiction suggests that fictive narratives cut across the sociological, religious, political, and economic situations of a particular society to effect control over the development of such a society in that regard.

Some narrative fiction presents events in a logical and orderly way. This orderly manner of presentation could be in form of the way the characters interact, what they say, and how the plot unfolds. This presentation style is largely the author's invention. The writer invents through imagination situations, settings, characters, events etcetera to entertain or educate his readers. Below are very important features that characterize the narrative (novel) and the texts under review possess these features.

1) The Theme: The theme of the novel refers to those features that reveal and reinforce what the readers perceive to be the story's most important ideas. Kanu (2008:90) simply defines it as "The main idea or underlying subject of a work of literature. The title of the story/book can often provide insight into the theme of the story. For instance, the title of J.C. Maduekwe's story *Uru Nwa* emphasizes a major idea in the story – that a child's presence in the family is very benefitting. Its theme borders on sex as not an important factor to value in a child. Both sexes are important. Ngozi, the chief protagonist brought back her estranged parents together. Ngozi determined to see that Wogu her father and Ahudiya her mother came together again as husband and wife and the reconciliation gave rise to pregnancy and the birth of a baby boy which has played in the background as the bone of contention. Ngozi strived to see that the father and mother made it again; never to be separated. Hence, the title of the novel – *Uru Nwa* gave a clue to the theme of the novel.

In *Ukpana Okpoko Buuru...*; the novel is suggesting a crude form of retributive justice, a pointer, if lurid, warning to the upholders of anarchy. That is corruption in a particular town and its antecedents on the leaders. The Odogwu in Ubesie's *Ukpana Okpoko Buuru* are robbers; thieves. Their nefarious activities are seen in today's Nigeria in the form of Boko-Haram. The rebels attacked the government of Ifite-Amaeke to live in anarchy; a situation where everybody behaves the way he likes without restriction. Committing crime-rapes, armed robbery, kidnapping, child trafficking, rituals, murder, and other vices have become the order of the day in our present society. Nevertheless, no matter how safe a criminal thinks he operates, he should bear in mind that the wages of sin are death.

Menihu the antagonist in all his strength and power was overtaken and killed. He defiled all cautions and warnings from Mazi Obijiofo – a man of integrity and as such one day, his cup was full. Hence, the title *Ukpana Okpoko Buuru...* If completed as a proverb will be *Ukpana Okpoko Buuru; nti chiri ya*.

Erimma on the other hand suggests a female name. The novel addresses many problems shared by early twentieth-century women, including their subordinate status and their confinement in the home. To emphasize the pervasiveness of these problems and the desperate measures women had to take to break out of restrictive social roles, Nzeakor projects Izugbeaku and the daughter, Erimma, who ended their isolation from taking decisions about their welfare. Erimma insisted on her decision of marrying a man of her choice, a man of integrity, and further her education. The theme of this is the roles of women in search of their independence in society.

2) The Setting: Fiction depends on its life in place. The place is the crossroads of circumstance, the proving ground of, what happened. Who's here? Who's coming? (Booth, Hunter & Mays, 2006: 196). The above statement suggests that the setting of a novel implies the place where the event happened. This is to say that the setting of the novel is the background of the story in the novel. It could as well be regarded as the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which the action(s) in the novel occurs.

For instance, the overall setting of *Erimma, Ukpana Okpoko Buuru, and Uru Nwa* is all in Igbo land. In

these novels, there is a realistic description of rooms, cities, villages, and other locations where actions take place.

3) The Plot: The sequential arrangement in a story is the plot of the novel. That is the pattern of events in the narrative. The plot is shaped by casual connections – historical, social, and personal; by the interaction between characters, and by the juxtaposition of events. Therefore plot is enriched in a novel by unexpected events; conflict, suspense, flashbacks, and foreshadowing. The struggle between the protagonists (the principal character) and the antagonist (the protagonist's opposition) lightens the reader's interest and involvement. As such, the plot is a very important feature in prose fiction. Minot (1993:178), agreed with this assertion by saying, "Fiction tends to initiate these patterns; what we call episodes in life become scenes in fiction. These are the basic units. And their arrangement is what we call plot". The novels – *Erimma*, *Ukpana Okpoko Buuru*, and *Urunwa*, all have their plots set in such a way that one event leads to another in such a way that suspense, conflict, flashbacks, foreshadowing, arouse the reader's interest and sustains the end of the story.

Point of View: This is the angle from which the story is told. Nidozi and Gautam (2010:139-140) explained four ways a story could be told: (i) innocent eye, - telling a story through the eyes of a child (ii) stream of consciousness – the story is told in such a way that the reader feels as if he is inside the head of one character and knows all his thoughts and reactions (iii) first person – the story is told by the protagonist or one of the characters who interact closely with the protagonist or other characters using pronouns I, me, we, etcetera (iv) omniscient – the author can narrate the story moving from one character to character, event to event, having free access to the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of the characters and information that are introduced where and when he/she chooses. This style of narration could as well be known as a third-person narrator (Kirszner & Mandel 2006:332). The writers of the three selected texts applied the third-person narrative technique in their works. The narrative techniques were very lucid.

Character/Characterization: A character in a novel could be a living or non-living thing. They are personified to represent actual people in real life. Booth, Hunter, and Mays (2006:140) say that:

Character inevitably is a focus of your response to fiction, even if the story goes out of its way to avoid creating the illusion of real people acting in the real world. Stories almost always concern human beings (animals, flowers, geometric shapes) and we are all experts from our own social experience, at attributing personalities to someone or something with a name... someone who acts, appears, or is referred to as playing a part in literary work usually fiction...

Characterization is the art and technique of representing fictional personages – depends upon action or plot as well as narration and point of view. In Igbo novels, characters are presented in this form. A character could be flat or round.

Onuekwusi (2008:70) says that characters in modern novels are made as real as possible. In the desire to make his story as believable as possible, the author gives real names to his characters. Sometimes, he gives them saw-names; Obi Okonkwo, Obi Udejaja, Oliver Twist, Jagua Nana, etcetera. The novelist also can go further in describing the physical attributes of the character like the nose, eye, lips, legs, head, etcetera. All these characters make the modern novel realistic unlike in romance where we meet fantastic characters imbued with supernatural attributes, which are either good or bad. Characters and characterization in *Erimma*, *Urunwa*, and *Ukpana Okpoko Buuru* represent real-life characters – Ahudiya, Wogu, Ngozi, Erimma Meniihu, etcetera.

The Language: Language is one of the most important features of narrative fiction. The medium of a prose narrative is the language that real men use in everyday conversation. A narrative is an attempt to capture human speech on paper. The more an author of prose fiction tries to approximate the language of characters to that of real life at their levels and statuses the more realistic his novel becomes. Though there are times when figures, images, symbols, or poetic language come in or become prominent and as such make the story literary. The narrative language of the chosen texts was the familiar language of the Igbo and their figurative usages.

Tone: When you write, the idea is to convey every sensation, sight, feeling, and emotion, to the reader. The tone reflects the mood of the narrator; the way he perceives or views society. The utterance of the writer (speaker) in a story could be loving or angry, serious or ironic, formal or intimate, sorrowful or joyous etcetera. For example, Ubesie's tone in *Ukpana Okpoko Buuru* is "cautious". The tone of a story like a tone of voice may convey not simply one attitude, but a medley. Not only the author's choice of details may lead us to infer his or her attitude, but also the choice of characters in a story, events, and situations and choice of words.

The authors presumably care about these imaginary people and, for the story to grasp and sustain our interest, have to make us see these people in such a way that we, too, will care about them through the author's tone.

Empirical Review

Several important studies and analyses have been conducted on Igbo novels. Mostly in the universities, at conferences, and at seminars. These literary criticisms of Igbo novels were based on mainly historical, biographical, sociological, and lately formalistic approaches to literature.

Emenyonu (1978:33-58) in his study about the rise of the Igbo novels dwell so much on the historical antecedents of *Omenyko*, *Ije Odumodu Jere*, and *Ala Bingo*. According to him,

The novel covers part of the period in Igbo history with which Chinua Achebe is concerned in *Things Fall Apart* and implies also some of the tensions between adherents of the old religion and Christian converts... The author of *Omenyko* can confine the falling apart of things to his hero alone, although he is sufficiently ambivalent, if not critical about some of the traditions and general attitudes of his society.

It is in like manner that Emenyony also appreciated Belgam's *Ije Odumodu Jere* and Achara's *Ala Bingo*. He continues:

Ije Odumodu Jere (Odumodu's travel) is set in the later part of the nineteenth century. The hero Odumodu is born in a poor family..."

In *Ala Bingo* he started thus:

Unlike Ije Odumodu Jere, D.N. Achara's *Ala Bingo* shows a strong indebtedness to and influence of the Igbo oral narratives. *Ala Bingo* is a long moral fable...

Looking at the above statements, one can see that Emenyonu is much concerned about the historical background of the authors and the text; the setting, the plot, etc. He did not look into the position of the readers and their contributions.

Also, Uzochukwu (1998:31-42) came up with a new form of critical approach to Igbo literature. He discovers that numerous Igbo works on poetry, fiction, and drama appearing on the literary scene have received attention through the traditional approach. The historical, biographical, and sociological criticisms which have evolved over many years have been in use for the criticism of Igbo novels. To make a difference, he emphasizes the use of a formalistic approach to the study of Igbo literary works. As such, he applies the formalistic and traditional approach in analyzing J.C. Maduekwe's Onye N'Ama Ya in *Nka Okwu*, *Uru Nwa*, and *Otu Mkpisi Aka*. He concludes again by saying:

But surely no literary critic should concern himself only with the study of content which will enable him to depict the didactic aspect of the text. He should concern himself more with the examination of the aesthetic qualities of the text as a work of art, hence the need for a formalistic approach to criticism. This is why this approach is generally more emphasized than the traditional approach.

As time goes on, more and more critical works of Igbo novels started to appear on the literary scene. This time, the background study of the text and author are deemphasized rather than the emphasis on the text form motivated by the use of a formalistic approach to literary analysis.

Epuchie (2010:127-132) reviewed Ubesie's *Mmiri Oku Eji Egbu Mbe*. In the course of this review, he talked about the title, publisher, author, typology, theme, summary, plot, setting, characters, characterization, language and tone, use of figurative language like proverbs, similes, metaphors, hyperbole, etc. The above method of criticism/appreciation falls under the traditional and formalistic view of literary work. Nevertheless, he tried to predetermine what could happen to children in junior secondary classes if they read the book.

In this sense, he attempted to think about certain readers but could not get through with the response of the readers themselves. He says:

The book is not suitable for junior secondary classes because of their age. Many of the children at this level might misconstrue the lesson of the story thinking that it is a good way of life. They may also think that they will get over it as soon as they grow up. They may not know that it is not getting over it. However, it is all right for the senior secondary classes as well as students in tertiary institutions...

Given the ongoing empirical review, one will accept that actually, most approaches to Igbo literature (novels) have not considered the reader by applying the reader-response criticism as an important method of literary appreciation and interpretation in the Igbo language to derive the meaning of a text.

It is on this premise, therefore that the writer wants to adopt the reader-response theory in analyzing the selected Igbo novels to prove the reality of fiction.

Summary of Review of Related Literature

Finally, one can see that traditional perspectives toward reading a literary work (novel) have tended to focus on a communication model, with the writer generating meaning and the text serving to disseminate that meaning to a reader who finds the author's message. Therefore, in this era, critics of Igbo literary works should recognize a shift away from traditional analytic methods regarding the nature of reading, the reader, and the text. Hence, the application of reader-response theory should be effectively used.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The responses of people who read the selected texts are captured here to ascertain the reality of fiction. As such the following questions were asked.

1. What real-life event or situation did you encounter in the novel you read?

Text	Respondent	Responses
<i>Erimma</i>	Okechukwu Obiukwu	In this text, I observed that what happened to Erimma happens to many girls in our land. They need to take strong decisions in their choice of marriage otherwise, their parents will force them into what they will not like. That is to say, some parents force their daughters into marriage, especially in the olden days.
<i>Uru Nwa</i>	Ijeuru Ijioma	In <i>Urunwa</i> , I have seen couples in real life, separate because of not having a male issue. The male issue is the bane of some marriages.
<i>Ukpana Okpoko Buuru</i>	Stella Uche	There is no difference between the 2010 kidnapping saga in Aba and the activities of the Odogwu. Many people left Aba for Owerri just like Obijiofor and his family. Even today, Igbo are leaving the Northern part of Nigeria to the east because of Boko Haram.

The responses of the above readers of the three Igbo novels prove that the situation in life reflects in fiction. As such, there is truth or an element of truth in fiction. This could be a result that authors living in the society where they create these works. Again, their zeal to communicate their personal feelings and ideologies to the public or the audience pushes them to hide at the back of their story to express their feelings. Therefore, their accounts are true but by adding and subtracting, the stories metamorphosed into fiction or untrue account but indirectly true. Corroborating, Minot (1993:148) says:

Without being aware of it, we reshape memories blocking certain events and inventing others. What we may think of as a character invented from nothing may actually be a disguised version of someone you know well or even a composite of two individuals. We all tend to be shy when we contemplate writing about our friends and relatives. We are apt to have feelings about them. We don't want to advertise. Even if we feel very close to a parent, friend, or lover, we also see aspects in him or her that are less than perfect. Indeed, there may even be aspects of ourselves that are less than perfect. Most of us can recall several incidents we would never reveal to a friend, much less to total strangers. How can we put these on paper for everyone to read? The answer is to disguise both characters and incidents through metamorphosis...

The above statement attests to the fact that fiction (novel) is the true account of personal incidents disguised by the author and presented to the reader. Therefore, fiction is a lie that tells the truth. The realities of life are communicated through fiction.

2. What character in the novel did you consider similar to yours or someone you know?

Text	Respondent	Response
<i>Erimma</i>	Obiukwu Okechukwu	I did not see any character as mine but that of my uncle Mr. Ubawuike is portrayed through Nnajofofor. My uncle forced his first daughter to marry his friend. The thing cost the girl's education. She couldn't continue her education. And at last, she forced herself out of the marriage because it has never been her mind.
<i>Uru Nwa</i>	Ijeuru Ijioma	I think my friend Onyinyechi suffered the same as Ahudiya. Onyinye was abandoned by her husband because she gave birth to girls, but later they reconciled and she gave birth to a baby boy. The story looks like hers. As such, it is realistic.
<i>Ukpana Okpoko Buuru</i>	Stella Uche	Meniihu is like Os isikankwu, a hardened criminal and kidnapper during Aba 2010 kidnapping saga.

From the above responses, one can see that the respondents identified one or more characters that are either like their friends, themselves, or like their friends and relatives. This suggests that characters in novels represent characters in human life. The readers feel associated with such characters and as such accept the truth of the narrative.

But Minot (1993:208) says that “when we as readers feel that a fictional character is “convincing”, 'vivid', or 'realistic', it is not because that character resembles someone familiar; the illusion we have is of meeting and coming to know someone new”. In other words, he is saying that the illusion of reality is not dependent on our

familiarity with real people but by 'willing suspension of disbelief'. But the truth of this is that in life, there is that level of consistency in our friends, relatives, or ourselves in terms of their manners that enables readers to associate them with fictional characters and therefore becomes convinced that characters in fiction are true to characters in real life.

3. Generally what are your feelings about the text you read? That is how you are influenced by the novel or vice versa to interpret the meaning of the text.

Text	Respondent	Response
<i>Erimma</i>	Obiukwu Okechukwu	The novel <i>Erimma</i> opened my eyes to know that someone having a strong determination to do something well is necessary. Erimma's strong decision to marry a man of her choice is encouraging. I will advise people to act according to their wishes. The text is convincing.
<i>Uru Nwa</i>	Ijeuru Ijioma	People should stop destroying their families because of male issues. Both boys and girls are very important. So, there shouldn't be much ado about anything.
<i>Ukpana Okpoko Buuru</i>	Stella Uche	The novel reminds me of the 2010 Aba kidnapping saga. I love it. Evil people must die.

It is evident from the above table that the readers were very free to say their minds. They talk about their personal preferences dislikes or disapproval, strong identification with a character, or rejection. They show a sense of tension and finally express their opinion without restriction. This is to show that reader response theory or criticism allows readers to be more self-conscious, and catalyzes a more critical view of their own identities.

Eagleton (1983:74) quoting Stanley Fish says that "Reading is not a matter of discovering what the text means, but a process of experiencing what it does to you". This is to say that the reader-response approach to literature creates room for readers to think critically and involve themselves deeply as they read. They keep their psyche in check.

4. What questions were you expecting the researcher will ask you from the text you read?

Text	Respondent	Response
<i>Erimma</i>	Obiukwu Okechukwu	A lot of questions like the names of the chief character, the author, date of publication, theme
<i>Urunwa</i>	Ijeuru Ijioma	I looked forward to talking about the chief character and the theme and summary
<i>Ukpana Okpoko Buuru</i>	Stella Uche	My own is that I do not know why you said I should read it but I said at best you will ask me about the theme and lesson of the text

From this table, one will notice from the readers' responses, that these readers are used to the traditional and formal form of analyzing literary work in the Igbo language. They were all writing almost the same thing. Their expectations about the questions they will be asked after the readings concern; the theme, plot, tone and

language, characterization, lesson, summary, the author's biography, year of publication, publishers etcetera. There is no evidence to show that the reader-response theory has been applied in the analysis of the Igbo novel. It is therefore against this backdrop that the writer has embarked on the investigation. The writer discovered that Igbo novels no longer attract many Igbo speakers apart from students and scholars of the Igbo language in colleges and universities because of the way it is presented and taught.

Summary

Given the foregoing, the study has been able to examine the reality of fiction based on the reader's response. It is important to note that without a reader being affected by the text/novel in his hands and without his interpretation of the work, the true meaning of the work will not be made manifest. Booth, Hunter, and Mays (2006:481) say that

One of the things readers do with the stories is to talk about them. These stories have not said it all, and readers derived evident pleasure from completing them, commenting on them, and making them their own in various ways.... if we are concerned with how people do read stories however, these lists outline an area for research... perhaps there are underlying regularities which in fact shape reader's performance...

As a reader, one brings to work his perspectives. His experiences, beliefs, and ideas about the issues discussed in the work and his assumptions about literature (novel) color his interpretations.

In the three novels analyzed, issues like overt feminist or working class bias, subtle political agenda, contemporary attitudes, nostalgia for a vanished past, outrage at a corrupt present, elitist, characters and events, the sympathetic perspective of issues, war, crime, love, hatred, tourism, forgiveness, counseling were all present. The reader's understanding of these attitudes contributes to his response or interpretation of the work.

It is vital to consider the reader's opinion and meaning of a literary piece which usually lies between the lines. That is, it is buried somewhere within it, waiting to be unearthed by the reader. On this premise, therefore, the writer recommends as follows:

- i. Authors should consider readers and make their work more intellectually challenging. This will require effort from readers to unlock ideas that will enrich and expand their understanding of themselves and the world.
- ii. Like a scientific theory, a literary interpretation must have a basis in fact, and the text should supply the fact against which interpretations should be judged.
- iii. Moreso, readers should know that whatever interpretation or response they make should be supported with specific references to the novel or text.
- iv. Finally, readers should not ignore or contradict evidence in the novel (text) to suit their own biases. As a reader reads and re-reads a text, let the reader continue to question and re-examine his judgments. The conversation between the reader and the text should be a dialogue, not a monologue. By doing so, readers may give fellow students and scholars new insight into the work. This is very important because reader-response theorists believe in the importance of recursive reading. That is reading and re-reading.

Above all these, it is advised that though reader-response critics permit a reader a fair degree of freedom, the reader is not free simply to interpret as he or she wishes. Therefore, for an interpretation to be an interpretation of a text or some other, it must be in some sense logically constrained by the text itself.

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