

THE RHETORICS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART* AND LESSONS FOR WRITERS IN A DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract

Literature as work of Art in Nigerian Language is always society oriented. This is predicated on the fact that art in African Society can be said to be society relevant and functional. The objective of this study therefore presents some of the rhetoric's Chinua Achebe employed in his writings especially in *Things Fall Apart* which writers of this age should emulate to bring about beautiful works of art. To do this, the study adopted the survey method to analyse the book in reference, backed with some selected literature in this area of study that was reviewed. Findings show that Achebe in this work gave an oral record of Igbo life. In an attempt to present this account in an interesting manner, he employed a lot of rhetoric which ranged from his good use of Igbo words, proverbs, flashbacks to storytelling. It is recommended that writers of this age employ these literary styles to embellish their works.

Keywords: Rhetorics, Proverbs, Arts, Storytelling, Lessons, Igbo, Writers, Digital, Age

Introduction

The word rhetoric comes from the Greek. It is oratorical which means public speaker. It is ultimately derived from the verb speak. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, which along with grammar and logic is one of the three ancient arts of discourse. Rhetoric aims to study the techniques writers or speakers utilize to inform, persuade or motivate particular audiences in specific situations Corbett (1990). Aristotle defines rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion”. Rhetoric typically is heuristics for understanding, discovering, and developing arguments for particular situations such as Aristotle's three persuasive audience appeals: logos, pathos and ethos. Aristotle O., (2008).

Rhetorics have from the beginning meant two things- ornamental speech and persuasive speech. These two things seem psychologically opposed to each other as the desire to ornament is essentially dis-interested and the desire to persuade, essentially the reverse. In fact, ornamental rhetoric is applied literature, or the use of literary art to reinforce the power of argument. Ornamental rhetoric acts on its hearers statistically, leading them to admire its own beauty or wit (like in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Persuasive rhetoric tries to lead people kinetically towards a course of action. One articulates emotion, the other manipulates it.

Therefore, rhetoric began by reflection on speech making and came to focus by oratory. The constituents of public oratory are ornamental figurative expressions. Rhetoric is not only ornamental but also instrument of persuasion. It is concerned with ensuring that the language of Literature is appropriate. One would therefore say that rhetoric is the raw material with which oratory is made possible. This can be achieved through the traditional sayings, expressions that have

become so traditional, recurring and universal to the user. Sayings in rhetorics come in form of proverbs, idioms, nuances and the likes

RHETORICS IN ACHEBE'S *Things Fall Apart*

The work *Things Fall Apart* is an oral record of Igbo life. The legendary of Okonkwo of Umuofia is recounted by the oral teller of tales whose conception of history is very different from ours. He takes into account not only what has happened but also what is fabled to have happened. He reconstructs the history of his people largely by drawing on myth and legend. Achebe is painstakingly accurate and precise in recording the legend, penetration into the bush land of Umuofia and nearby communities. Despite their absolute fidelity to historical truth, the colonial experience is presented from the perspective of the Igbo. The lives and feeling of an average Igbo man was X-rayed in Okonkwo who from the beginning through the end of the novel was conscious and afraid of failure unlike his father Unoka who was known throughout the village for the weakness of his matchet (*Things Fall Apart*, pg.13). Although Edema (2000) in his article Rhetorical Implications of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* summarized the rhetorics in three words Ethos, Pathos and Logos as shown below.

His use of Ethos, Pathos and Logos

Achebe in his historical fiction text *Things Fall Apart* emphasises that “there is no story that is not true” (*Things Fall Apart* 141). This is because according to him, that culture is unique does not make it bad or wrong. Achebe wants to reduce the amount of shown ignorance to anyone different and offer insight to the Nigerian people. He assumes a sympathetic tone to Ụmụọfịa by connecting his characters to his audience, the Europeans and Western civilisation. He uses ethos, pathos, and logos to connect the themes of family and government. Achebe employs rhetorical devices to introduce the aspects of family and government. Ethos is used because it gives Achebe more credibility due to the fact that he is a Nigerian.

The reason that family is mainly focused on is that Okonkwo is staying outside of the clan with his mother's kinsmen. Okonkwo's families have to establish a new farm and therefore were working very hard. Pathos is used by making the readers sympathetic towards the family. “Okonkwo and his family worked very hard to plant a new farm” (131). By doing this Achebe is able to draw the readers in, to fully connect them, whether it's for good or bad. Now that the readers have a better connection with Okonkwo's family and know that Nwoye was thought to be like Okonkwo's father, Achebe brings forth the feeling of betrayal. “what moved Obierika to visit Okonkwo was the sudden appearance of the latter's son, Nwoye among the missionaries in Ụmụọfịa (143). With his quote it is known that Okonkwo will feel betrayed, and since the audience is connected to him, they know that he will feel betrayed. Achebe once again uses pathos to portray the feeling of betrayal. “How could he have begotten a son like Nwoye, denigrate an effeminate?”(153). It can be seen from this that Okonkwo believes that Nwoye has disgraced the family name, and Okonkwo regrets having him as a son.

Okonkwo comes back to find he has lost his spot in the higher-ups of the clan. “He had lost the chance to lead his war clan against the new religion, which he was told, had gained ground (171). Achebe uses logos in this in order to give an understanding of what happens on the punishment side of life. In this portion of the novel, Okonkwo is back in Ụmụọfịa, and he finds the tribe has been taken over by the missionaries. “The white missionary was proud of him and he was one of the first men in Ụmụọfịa to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion, or Holy Feast as it was called in Igbo”. (174).

Ethos occurs in this section because of what is meant to convey. Achebe wants to get his point across to Europeans and the Western world, however, they would not read this if the white men were portrayed as evil and inaccurate. By using celebrations and Sacraments that actually occur, Achebe gains credibility for his work. Earlier in the book, Achebe talked about how Ụmụọfịa was feared by the other clans. By letting the missionaries in and granting them the land to stay, they have lost some of that respect. “If Ụmụọfịa decides on war, all would be well. But if they chose to be cowards, he (Okonkwo) would go out and avenge himself” (119). Achebe helps the audience understand that some people in the tribes need to be the strongest. However, Edeme did not exhaust the rhetorical expressions Achebe employed in the work. Some others were left untouched. They include: his use of Igbo words, economy of words/use of proverbs, poems, hyperbole of exaggeration, flashbacks, short stories.

His use of Igbo words

Achebe in his *Things Fall Apart* translates Igbo expressions literally as they are said in Igbo language. For instance, when fear gripped Okonkwo that the reputation and wealth he had built up for years would pass on to a worthless son, Nwoye. He threatens Nwoye with; I will not have a son who cannot hold his head in the gathering of a clan. I would sooner, strangle him with my own hands. As Nwoye continued staring at him, he came with this outburst: “and if you stand staring at me like that, Amadiora will break your head for you. Amadiora is an Igbo representation of an evil spirit and this is what Achebe lifted and used exactly to express the same feeling of great misfortune falling on Nwoye.

Also while restive as the general reaction to the Christians seen to be gaining acceptance, Okonkwo had this to say: “It is not our custom to fight for our gods” Let us not reason like cowards “if a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I will take a stick and break his head. These people are daily pouring filth over us, and Okeke says we should pretend not to see? Okonkwo made a sound full of disgust... This expression is typical of the Igbos. It could be framed in a better grammatical expression but Okonkwo wants the Igbo voice of the novel to perceive and recreate the Igbo experience in the language of myth and legend even on the eve of his departure from Mbata, Okonkwo could not conceal his hatred for the new religion and he had this to say, “An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and brothers. He can curse the gods of his fathers and his ancestors, like a hunter's dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on its master.”

Achebe numerous use of Igbo words and even names in presenting his expression as against its English counterpart is also of interest. For example ... They called him the little bird, Nza (instead of wren) who so far forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenges his Chi (instead of god..) (*Things Fall Apart* pg. 22) and also in pg. 58: ... and why did you not say so, you wicked daughter of Akalogoli (instead of a hoohgan or useless child etc). Other Igbo words he employed in adding flavour to his work include Agadi-nwanyi, Agbala, Efulufu, Egwugwu, Ekwe, Eneke-Nti-Oba, Inyanga, Iyi-uwa, Isaifi, Kotima, Obodo- dike and a host of others.

Economy of words/use of proverbs

Achebe uses very simple and short sentences. Many writers have commented and praised his skills especially in *Things Fall Apart* which makes for its ease in reading and understanding. Both are deliberate and enabled Achebe to pass on his point without having to confuse his subject. Sometimes, economy of words and proverbs invoke the atmosphere of sacredness. Listen to this, “We cannot bury him. Only strangers can. We shall pay your men to do it. When he has been buried,

we shall then do our duty to him. We shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land” There is also his style of economy not only economising words and praises but also of narrative. If one looks carefully, one would see the stitches where Achebe has been sewing the different bits of his narratives together. These apparent stitches do not jar but they serve as it were to bring the colours together.

Early in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe writes, “Among the Igbos, the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the oil with which words are eaten. This sentence is a key and complement to Achebe's skill as a novelist. In all his novels especially *Things Fall Apart*, he uses proverbs with the art of a traditional conversationalist. Sometimes, it seems a pity, that Achebe has, of necessity, to explain his proverbs. Achebe employed the use of proverbs greatly in *Things Fall Apart*. Some of the examples are during his visit to Nwakibie, Kolanut was presented and while celebrating it the following prayers were made ... “Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other let his wing break.” (pg. 14). Also in page 15, one could see the two proverbs below; “A toad does not run in the day time for nothing”... an old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb and, “the lizard jumped from the high Iroko tree to the ground, nodded his head and said, he would praise himself if no one else did. Also in pg. 16, the proverb Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt shooting without missing, it has also learnt to fly without perching. As our fathers said you can tell a ripe corn by its fruit... was said by Nwakibie to explain to Okonkwo why he has decided to say no to people who always come to him for help. This articulate use of proverbs runs the Novel in review. The proverbs as seen above are:

- (i) Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other let his wings break.
- (ii) A toad does not run in the day time for nothing.
- (iii) An old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb.
- (iv) The lizard jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground nodded his head and said, he would praise himself if no one else did.
- (v) Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt shooting without missing, it has also learnt flying without perching.

Poems

Twice or more, Achebe engaged the use of poems to settle matters in one's mind just like Ikemefuna did when they were taking him to kill thus:

Ezeelina, elina
Sala
Ezeilikwaya
Ikwabaakwaoligholi
Ebe Dands na-echieze
Ebe uzuzu na-eteegwu
Sala.

Also, when Okafor threw his opponent in a wrestling bout, the women sang this song in honour of Okafor.

Who will wrestle for our village?
Okafor will wrestle for our village.
He has thrown a hundred men.
He has thrown four hundred men.

Hyperbole or exaggeration

Achebe is quite abreast of his expressions. In so many instances, he uses hyperbole or exaggeration to drive home his mind in the novel. For instance, in page. 26 there is the story he told about a wealthy man who sets before his guests a mound of foofoo so high that those who sat on one side could not see what was happening on the other, and it was not until late in that evening that one of them saw for the first time his in-law who had arrived during the meal time and had fallen on the opposite side of the food. This story sound incredible but Achebe employed it to explain how mountainous the foofoo was. This is also compared with the story on page. 51 where one Whiteman was said to be as white as a white chalk.

Flashbacks

He also employed regular use of flashbacks and most times, he suspends his for a short while before continuing the story. A good example is on page. 76, when Okonkwo went to meet Ekwefi at the mouth of the shrine where Chinelo (the Agbala priestess) took Ezimma to, instead of telling the readers what happened when Chinelo came out and met Okonkwo and Ekwefi, he turned the story to how Okonkwo and Ekwefi met for the first time before they got married. The former story was however continued on page. 77. Also, flashback was used on page. 84 when Okonkwo heard the news of the death of Ogbuefi Ezeudo. He remembered the last time he visited Ezeudo's house and his words to him was; "that boy calls you father, bear no hand in his death."

Short stories

For clarity and easy understanding, Achebe illustrates some of his points with short stories. This is an art he employed greatly in *Things Fall Apart*. For instance, while discussing about the foolishness of Abame people for killing the Whiteman, he told this story: mother kite once sent her daughter to bring food; she went and brought back a duckling. You have done well, said mother kite to her daughter, but tell me, what did the mother of this duckling say when you swooped and carried its child away?". "It said nothing," replied the kite. "It just walked away". "You must return the duckling," said the mother." There is something ominous behind the silence ..." (page. 98). This story is also rendered in very short sentence; an art which is peculiar to Achebe.

THE LESSONS

The writers of this age should try to rekindle the interest of the readers by writing about the culture and tradition of the people like Achebe did in his works. It is only when this is done that literature will contribute meaningfully towards social and political changes in a society. Also, Igbo writers should as a matter of fact employ the language at every point where it is necessary. This will help the language to withstand the threat of extinction which it faces now. Authors can have an English interpretation for such words provided the message is conveyed.

Proverbs bring about beauty in a literary work. Adequate use of them to a great extent attracts readership and at the same time makes a case for Igbo language. Igbo proverbs are very rich and meaningful. Conveying certain innate meanings with them makes a work very robust and ornamental. It equally makes for economy of words. Instead of a very long explanation; one can capture the explanations with one short proverb. Writers of this age are advised to read verbosely and understand what they are writing about. In this situation, they can now choose the best means and languages to convey the message in a beautiful way like the writers of the old. A good work is one that spikes interest in the readers. Nothing more than the use of these ornamental words does the job more than any other thing.

Conclusion

Achebe as a novelist knows how to convey his message in a most subtle way. He gave a true account of his artistry in the use of words by employing a whole lot of rhetorics in *Things Fall Apart*. Since he was giving an oral account of Igbo life, he engaged a whole lot of Igbo proverbs, idioms and a host of others. This gave the work the flare it has among all other novels written by him.

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