

A Deconstructive Analysis of Marriage in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*

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Abstract

Religious and cultural phenomenon pervades the works of literature. In Amadi's novel: *The Concubine*, the literary artist reflects religious beliefs in the co-existence between the physical and the metaphysical realms of existence through the institution of marriage. The study adopts deconstruction theoretical framework. Deconstructive criticism evaluates societal values or norms logically since a text is a product of the setting it reflects. The focus of analysis is on existing contradictions in the literary text. The objective of the study is to analyze the various contradictions in the selected novel of Amadi. The study uses descriptive and analytical approaches. The paper discovers that contradictions exist in the various elements of the novel. The paper concludes that where equivocal inequality exists, the innocent and weaker party suffer.

Keywords: Deconstruction, Analysis, Marriage and Concubine.

Introduction

Human continued existence is anchored on the institution of marriage. Lives are generated through procreation. Marriage is a common universal socio-cultural phenomenon. It is the medium through which generational longevity is preserved. Marriage becomes an issue of interest when there is a sensed deviation from the norm.

In Amadi's *The Concubine*, the novelist uses the chronological plot structure to mirror the phenomenon of marriage. The plot of the story revolves round the heroine — Ihuoma, her human suitors- Emenike, Madume and Ekweme along with her spirit-husband- the Sea-king. The central character becomes the object of conflict climaxing in chains of deaths. While the Sea-king is the villain, the human characters are the victims of the tussle over a woman with dual character. The critic centers his interest on the observable or conceived contradictions in the presentation of marriage using deconstructive theoretical framework.

Statement of Problem

This work is a study on deconstructive analysis of marriage in Amadi's *The Concubine*. It explores how deconstructive criticism of marriage informs the contents and contradictions that exist in the selected novel. This is examined in line with the research questions.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to carry out a deconstructive analysis of marriage in Amadi's *The Concubine*. In the light of the above stated aim, the critic subjects the subjects of discourse to re-evaluation of the marriage between the two realms of existence in the novel. The specific objectives are to examine Ihuoma's incarnation as a human being and the resultant tragedies of the union on the human characters.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on one novel. The novel is *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi. The study is on the clash of interest between the metaphysical realm of existence and the physical world of man.

Research Questions

This study aims to examine two research questions. The research questions centers on socio-religious and cultural phenomenon of human and spiritual characters. The study answers the questions: Discuss the contradictions in the heroine's incarnation into the world of man. Examine the resultant opposition of the supernatural world to men's marital desires.

Research Methodologies

The methods the study adopts are descriptive and analytic. It uses critical thinking and evaluation of relevant data to the research. The perception of the various oppositions in the plot, settings, characters among others constitute the focus of the paper.

Justifications for the Study

The critic examines a deconstructive analysis of marriage in Amadi's *The Concubine* because, the phenomenon can be adopted to freshly illuminate our understanding of the novel. Previous critics like Adewoye (1996:7), Osundare (1980:107), Pamela (2006:21) and a host of others have hardly paid attention to how incarnation determine the form of the novel. Osundare (1980:107), Adewoye (1996:76) and Pamela (2006:21) use the sociological theory in their analysis of the selected novel of Amadi. Abdul (2010:10) and Ogbedie (2011:29-37) use the anthropological literary theory. Ajiboye (1994:78) uses the archetypal approach. The implication is that very few critics — if any has adopted the deconstructive theoretical approach in the analysis of the selected novel of Amadi.

Amadi belongs to the first generation of literary artists in Nigeria. This notwithstanding, there is need to carry out an analysis of marriage in his selected novel. This is because, there are still phenomenon that are yet to be fully explored. Also, a deconstructive analysis of marriage in Amadi's *The Concubine* is yet to be given the attention it deserves. Lastly, this paper is in addition to scholarly work on Amadi's thesis on African beliefs.

Expected Contributions to Knowledge

This study is expected to enhance our perception and understanding of marriage in Amadi's novel. Also, this work would add to existing critical works on Amadi. Finally, the study would be a useful reference material for scholars on Amadi in particular and African literature in general.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is deconstructive criticism. This is a philosophical theory and a textual approach to literary criticism. It was propounded by the philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). Morris Rosahnd (2007:355-389) and Kandell Jonathan (20 17- 74) are of the view that this critical approach focuses on issues that runs counter to the intended meaning of the writer. To Royle Nick (2003:6-24) Ferdinand de Saussure is a major influence on Derrida's deconstructionist theory. Wood David and Bernasconi Robert (1988) opine that to Derrida, language as a system of signs and words have meanings because of the contrast between the signs. Kandel Jonathan (2017:1) buttresses this view when he states that one understands concepts in the context of its opposite or contradiction. It is on the above basis that deconstructionist critics are of the view that the duty of

the deconstructionist critic is to find and overturn the various oppositions in a literary piece. In a nutshell therefore, one can infer that deconstructive theory attends to the interplays in the differences.

Derrida Jacques, Bass Allan (2001:276) and Buchman Ian (2010:165) state that deconstructive criticism is concerned with three basic philosophical issues. To them, the theory contributes to a literary work by re-evaluating societal values on pure reason. Secondly, they assert that a text outlives its author and that literary works become part of its cultural habits. This in turn surpasses authorial intention since the literary artist is subject to his culture. Lastly, deconstructionism re-evaluates classical dialectics. The above principles determine to a very large extent the interpretation the critic gives to a given literary text.

Caputo John (1997:32) and Powell Jim (2005:105) state clearly that Derrida is not the only voice when discussing deconstructionist critical theory. To them, other proponents of deconstructionism include: Paul de Man of the Yale school. Others are Richard Rorty, John Caputo, Niall Lucy, David Allison, Paul Ricœur, Richard Ellman among others. The above critics are of the view that deconstructive criticism carries out thorough, careful, sensitive and yet transformational readings of literary texts.

Brook Peters (1995:84) and Lucy Niall (2004:204) add that deconstructive criticism concentrates on those issues that runs counter to their apparent intended sense. This is what Derrida refers to as authorial genesis. Such analysis centers on the aporias and ellipses of thoughts. Through this art and act, supposed contradictions are exposed. It is on this basis that Powell Jim (2005:105) states that this approach to criticism indicates that no literary texts is discrete but contains several irreconcilable and contradictory meanings. The implication is that literary texts are open to different interpretations. This constitutes the aporia in the text according to Derrida.

This paper attempts a deconstructive analysis of the contradictions that exist in Amadi's presentation of the cultural phenomenon of marriage in *The Concubine*. This critic adopts the views of Derrida Jacques, Bass Allan, Buchman Ian, Brook Peters and Lucy Niall. One observes contradictions in the different elements of the novel. It is these contradictions that this paper focuses attention on.

Literature Review

In presenting the issue of marriage in Amadi's *The Concubine*, the novelist mirrors the interactions between the physical and metaphysical realms of existence. While the Sea-king is an archetype of elemental forces, Madume, Emenike and Ekweme represent the human world. The protagonist is a dual character belonging to the two realms of existence.

In Amadi's *The Concubine*, the world of the supernatural conditions the characters' overall behaviour. Wali (1994:19) says that "the gods were invisible, elusive, woven into the fabric of time and space". To Osofisan (1994:33), "one begins to feel that life is cruel and to be a man is to be a victim". Akobogu (2014:59) uses adjectives like "the unknown, invisible and presumed world to describe the gods.

This critic refutes the above assertions about the gods. Firstly, the gods in *The Concubine* have figurines in the place of worship. These objects of worship conjures in the consciousness of the characters, the personalities of their gods. Secondly, it is not all the characters that suffered calamities in the hands of the gods.

Wotogbe-Weneka (1994: 83) points out that the narrator of *The Concubine* mirrors the belief in spirits. Reiterating the place of elemental forces as antagonists in Amadi's *The Concubine*, Osofisan (1994:33)

points out that “man is the biggest joker in the galaxy. Like laboratory rats in a huge cage, we react just the way the Master Scientist wants us to react”. The critic uses the above metaphor for Amadi’s characters (Emenike, Madume and Ekweme). The “Master Scientist” is a symbolic representation of the gods and their supremacy over man while man is likened to a laboratory rat. The juxtaposition between the gods and man shows man’s place in the universe.

Ihekweazu (1994:89) reacts to Osundare’s article “As grasshoppers to Wanton Boys” and states that every religion has its own way of confronting societal problems. Amadi presents some of the gods in *The Concubine* as unkind, not caring and that malevolent spirits are responsible for the negative occurrences in the society.

The deconstructive analysis of the above view by Osundare points out some contradictions in the beliefs and views of the Igbo society about their gods. The people of Omokachi village see their gods on another light. To them, the gods are dependable hence their reliance on them for their overall wellbeing. A close examination of man and his actions with reference to Madume and Ekweme show that they are responsible for their tragic experiences. They dare to struggle with a Sea-king for the hand of Ihuoma — Sea goddess.

Ihekweazu (1994:93) gives a balanced view about the world of the supernatural when he says that; The gods in *The Concubine* are neither absolutely good nor bad. Some are destructive and it is interpreted as punishment for wrong done while others enact positive moral principles.

It is pertinent to note that the existence of malevolent spirits in the setting of *The Concubine* questions the authenticity of Osundare’s disposition about the gods. It is widely believed that malevolent spirits are not gods. They are known to scheme and wreak havoc on their human victims. The people of Omokachi in *The Concubine* believe in the supremacy of elemental forces. Maduka (1974:39) states that divine agencies are superior to man in all spheres. This accounts for the dependency of Amadi’s characters on the gods. This being the case, one questions the rationale behind the rebellious actions of Madume and Ekweme after knowing that Ihuoma is a Sea goddess. The above reviews by Wali (1994:19), Osofisan (1994:33), Ihekweazu (1994:89), Wotogbe Weneka (1994:83), Akobogu (2014:59) among others critic the role of the gods generally in Amadi’s *The Concubine*. They adopt the sociological, anthropological and archetypal critical approaches. Their interest is not solely on marital issues. It is on this basis that this critic examines the phenomenon of marriage using deconstructive critical theoretical framework. Our interest is to reveal the various contradictions in the contest for Ihuoma’s hand in marriage in Amadi’s *The Concubine*.

The Uneven Contest Between Man and the Supernatural Forces in Amadi’s *The Concubine*

Different personalities inhabit the two different settings in the novel. In the physical setting, (Omokachi village), there are evidences of religious settings like shrines, temples and medicine houses. These are the abodes of elemental forces and they are sacred places of communion between man and the gods. The sacred places house sacred objects. The figurines are objects of worship and carry notions of positive and creative powers. Ironically Emenike, Madume and Ekweme seek divine intervention from the mediums when Death threatens their existence. The trio end up as victims of transcendental forces.

Amadi uses parallel dimension through the presentation of alternative settings — the sea. This setting is different from the familiar material realm. It is this setting that the heroine incarnates from. There is interaction between the physical setting of man (Omokachi Village) and the metaphysical realm of existence that the sea represents. The two worlds of existence are parallel to each other; the spiritual is superior in all spheres of life to that of the world of man. This makes the contest for Ihuoma

an imbalanced struggle. One do not see the moral justification in Ekweme challenging and daring the Sea-king for Ihuoma's sake. He misses the object of his contest and his life in the process.

The novelist uses convergent evolution to reflect the inequality that exists between the physical world of Omokachi Village and the spiritual world of the Sea. The superior setting over rides the inferior one and this is a realistic presentation of the two locales.

The critic discovers that the literary artist deploys convergent evolution due to contamination as a plot structure. The culture of Omokachi Village encourages man to marry either a young woman or a widow. Unfortunately, Ememke, Madume and Ekweme trespasses the culture of marrying a married woman. Even though Ihuoma marries Ememke as a young lady, she is already a married woman before her birth. The status of her being single contradicts her true marital status in the spiritual world. In Omokachi community, the society frowns at disregard to the institution of marriage. The implication is that, what seems right to Emenike, Madume and Ekweme is actually a taboo in eye of the community.

In Amadi's *The Concubine*, the novelist uses religious languages like incantations, chants and invocations. These are religious expressions. The essence of their usage is to invoke divine agencies to redeem man from evils. The implication is that man conciliates elemental forces to antagonize fellow divine agencies. Despite the powerful influences the dibias have, at the end of the novel, man becomes the victim of his fears. Emenike, Madume and Ekwene end up dying despite the various incantations and invocations.

In analyzing character in Amadi's *The Concubine*, our focus is on the Sea-king, Ihuoma, Emenike, Madume and Ekweme. Neil (1978:340) discusses his perception of divine agencies in relation to the Sea-king when he states that the supernatural appear:

All powerful but invisible while man is "an impotent object: character who have been worn down and had the life beaten out of them" ... people who are incapable of resistance.

In Amadi's *The Concubine*, the Sea-king functions as a judge. The narrator states that:

He is too powerful to be fettered with and when he is on the offensive, he is absolutely relentless. He uses all the powers at his command. They are fatal (p.196).

The Sea-king functions as the accuser and judge over Emenike's, Madume's and Ekweme's involvement with Ihuoma. The images of "powerful, absolutely relentless, fatal", etc. conjures the capabilities of the supernatural. He uses the entire arsenal at his disposal against his foes. According to the narrator, the Sea-King "liquidated" all his rivals.

Ideally, the judge's role is to adjudicate his judgment on the basis of evidences. The Sea- king's emotion and hatred against man-folk take his better side. His judgment of the trio in Amadi's *The Concubine* contradicts the ideals of moral judgment. Mortal men marry on the bases of love and moral rectitude of the would - be - wife. Secondly, Ihuoma is not conscious of being an incarnate of the Sea-goddess. To Emenike, Madume and Ekwene, the centre character is like all other ideal women out there. It is on this basis that this critic is of the view that there are contradictions in the presentation of marriage in Amadi's novel: *The Concubine*.

Apart from the Sea-king, Ihuoma is another character whose presentation exhibits some contradictions. Ihuoma's physical appearance and disposition negates her personality. Through the use of rhetorical question, the narrator asks: "have you seen anyone quite so right in everything, almost perfect? (p.196). It must be pointed out that it is the desire of almost all men to have a perfect woman as a wife. The image of the heroine's perfection attracts men. The joy they dream to derive

from their union with Ihuoma turns sour as a result of the tragic experiences that proceed their entanglement with Amadi's centre of consciousness.

Also, the name of Ihuoma means "good face". This can be interpreted to mean "good luck". Unfortunately, she is "bad luck" personified. Instead of the pleasure she and the human husbands intend to derive from her adventure in the world of man, sorrow and mourning become her lots. She becomes a death trap and carrier since all the three men who seek her hand in marriage die one after the other.

Ihuoma embarks on a journey to experience life as lived by man. Ihuoma's journey from the Sea — world to the world of man is what Bateman Chris (2005:10-11) refers to as the Quest plot. Unfortunately, the object of her quest brings untold frustration and sorrow. The quest plot is closely related to meta-plot.

Amadi uses the meta-plot. Ihuoma's incarnation in the form of human translates her from the metaphysical realm of existence to the physical realm. Her coming to the world of Omokachi is a form of adventure. She dreams of tasting the life of humans. She succeeds but her aim of fully utilizing the opportunity given her by her spirit husband becomes an illusion due to subsequent deaths of Emenike, Madume and Ekweme. This constitutes the frustration stage of her adventure. She confronts the wrath of her spirit husband who once sees her as his favourite. Out of anger, the Sea-king becomes her villain. The resultant effect is the nightmare stage. This constitutes the climax of the plot.

The omniscient narrator informs that "in the middle of the compound stood her husband's grave" (p.19). The above personification is a warning to the men and it prefigures other tragic incidents that will befall Madume and Ekweme later in the novel after the death of the first victim of Ihuoma's spirit husband.

The omniscient narrator describes the negative outcome of Ihuoma's quest.

"Her hair was closely shaven according to tradition, she looked emaciated, her check-bones showed and her voice was husky and uncertain, her dress was untidy" (p.28).

The above description shows Ihuoma's state when mourning the death of her first human husband. The narrator paints a pathetic picture of the most beautiful woman in Omokachi village. Instead of the joy of Ihuoma's adventure in the world of man, she experiences tragic twist of fate thus: "The heroine becomes saddened and sorrowful at the mere look of her sack cloth, but sadness and sorrow go well with loneliness" (p.36).

Similarity, there are contradictions in the intent (marriage) of Emenike, Madume and Ekweme in marrying Ihuoma. The essence of marital unity is for companionship and happiness among others. Unfortunately, all the characters that involve themselves with Ihuoma in marriage end up without achieving their desired aspirations. Emenike dies as a result of an assumed "luck-chest", Madume dies as a blind man and hangs himself. Ekweme becomes the victim of the arrow against a lizard.

The narrator uses allegory of the "tortoise whose trap had caught an impossible fairly in the form of an animal. If he took the animal away, he was to die. If he sets it free, he was still to die" (p. 117). The allegory reflects the hopeless state of man. The object of fulfillment 'catching an animal' becomes the source of human tragedy. Ihuoma is a symbolic representation of the trap while the trapper represents Ekweme. The allegory foreshadows the death of Ekweme. It also indicates that he cannot escape the wrath of the Sea — king.

The moment Ekweme shows his interest in Ihuoma, he becomes a marked man for death. This accounts for his insensitivity and lack of interest in Ahurole. The omniscient narrator describes Ahurole thus: "Ahurole was pretty... Her breast stood firm and defiant.... Ahurole's features had the

firmness of her youth and her steps were elastic" (p.119). The use of detailed description of Ahurole is intentional. With the mental picture of her features, one wonders why Ekweme is not contended with her. To Ekweme, the love portion Ahurole administer to his food and its aftermath effects are now blessings in disguise. He says: "My illness, or call it what you like, is almost a blessing in that respect" (p. 189). Amadi uses the above irony to point out the contradiction in human expectations in particular and in life generally. Unfortunately, what Ekweme sees as blessing becomes the cause of his tragedy.

The motif of sacrifice is a recurrent phenomenon in Amadi's novel *The Concubine*. The essence of sacrifice is to avert evil. The omniscient narrator points out that:

...people did not just die without a reason; they died either because they had done something wrong or because they had neglected to minister to the gods or the spirits of their ancestors (p.53).

In Omakachi setting, the people believe in the efficacy of sacrifice. It is a potent medium to appease divine agencies. Through sacrifice, they hope to prevent all forms of predicaments. In Amadi's *The Concubine*, Emenike, Madume, Ekweme and members of their families propitiate the spirits, ancestors and their gods to no avail. The impending doom they try to avoid befall them all. They did not escape the wrath of the Sea-king despite the sacrifices. The implication is that, there is no efficacy in sacrifice. The experiences the novelist mirrors here run counter to the belief system of the people of Omokachi. To them, Sacrifice is a life saver and that the gods react positively and favorably to sacrifices adherents offer to them.

Conclusion

The paper discovers that the people of Omokachi village and its environs are conscious of the powerful influence of divine agencies. This accounts for the awesome reverence the citizens give to the world of the supernatural. It becomes an unusual incident when man engages the gods in a contest. The processes and outcomes of Emenike, Madume and Ekweme's struggle to marry a Sea-goddess creates series of contradictions. At the end of the tragic design by divine agencies, man end up as victim for over stepping his bounds.

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