



**Admiralty Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, ISSN 1597–278X**

---

## **Literary Techniques in Selected Nigerian Novels**

**Chukwuka Eugene OFIE**

Department of English and Literary Studies,  
Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria

---

**Research Article**

---

### **ABSTRACT**

This work focused on form and content of literary techniques in select Nigerian novels. Tanure Ojaide in *The Activist* (2006), Ngozi Chuma-Udeh in *The Presidential Handshake* (2013) and *Teachers On Strike* (2005), Helon Habila in *Waiting For An Angel* (2003) and Florence Orabueze in *Men Behind The Masks* (2010) provide the anchor for the evaluation and appropriation of literary devices employed by the novelists. The concern of Nigerian post-independence literature is to put fore through different means how bad governance has been the foundation of high percentage of political, economic, religious, social conflict in Nigeria leading to instability and social dislocation of the governed from the mainstream Nigerian society. Literature is seen to be the product of the society and should reflect the happenings of the society. This study demonstrates with adequate examples from the novels how the novelists utilized literary devices which constitute the major influence in the five novels. The study seeks to broaden the relationship between literature and literary techniques. This research explores the major techniques visible in the novels. This study employs the content analysis approach to qualitative research methodology. The conceptual framework is resistance and theoretical framework is Marxism and sociological approach to literature. This research ultimately highlights literary techniques as standardized methods writers use to convey and enhance their literary works as literary techniques further help writers to create the required enlightening effect. This study proves the importance of literary techniques in literature as well as deepens literary scholarship on Nigerian novels.

**Keywords:** Literary techniques, literary works, Nigerian novels, Novelist, scholarship,

---

**Corresponding author:** Dr. Chukwuka Eugene Ofie: ofiechukwuka@gmail.com

## INTRODUCTION

Form and Content align together and are dependent of each other. Content is what an author desires to say or communicate to the reader while Form paints clear picture of how the author chooses to write or say it. However, literary scholars have argued over the importance of form and content in literature. Nkume (2008:14) believes form is important in literature. According to him:

Form is primarily the way literature is presented. It is the visual appeal that a piece of art has on the readers' eyes. Considering that literature has much to do with communication through symbols as much as words to convey meaning, the shape or image that an author develops in his/her piece of literary work cannot be ignored.

Writers of literature have insisted that literature is not only meant for entertainment of readers but to impact positively on the society. The relevance of literature to the society goes beyond entertainment as the literary artist serves as a channel through which the social, political, cultural and economic issues that ravage a given society are explored.

This study is a critical analysis of selected Nigerian novels. It examines the reemployment of literary devices in the selected novels and how they effectively strengthen the novels thematic preoccupation. In critical literary analysis, scholars like Mulokozi (1996), Emenyonu (2006) and Newell (2006) alluded that examining different elements of literary is not considered an end in itself but rather a process towards helping readers to better appreciate and understand the literary work of literature as a whole. A critical analysis of literary works certainly deals with different types of images in or with the relationship

between the form and content of the literary work as stated by Khamis (2000) and Barber (1995). Literary devices are the soul of every literary expression. Asika (2018:137) insists: "Writers employ various elements, ideas and techniques which help them to arrive at the message of their writings and give their works the desired shape, form, content and pattern"

Content connotes what is expressed in literary work. Content is the message which the writer divulges to the reader. The message from the author in literary work highlight the author's state of mind as seen in Barton (2004) and Turco (1999). Literature is the reflection of the society. Literature reflects society negatively and positively as it is difficult to find a work of literature that is devoid of issues of particular societies. Before independence of Nigeria in 1960, literature which emanated from Nigeria constituted acts of disillusionment against colonialism and celebration of the heroic grandeur of the African past. African nay Nigerian writers of colonial literature criticise the negative western narratives of Africa and her people. To this end, the colonial writers showcase the need for Africans to tell their own stories. Years after end of colonialism in Africa, it became glaring that rulers of independent Africa displayed gross irresponsibility in tackling the continent's affairs which often results to chaos and military intervention against the political rulership of the continent.

This study intends to show the appropriation of literary techniques employed by the novelists selected for this research. Tanure Ojaide in *The Activist* (2006), Ngozi Chuma-Udeh in *The Presidential Handshake* (2013) and *Teachers On Strike* (2005), Helon Habila in *Waiting For An Angel* (2003) and Florence Orabueze in *Men Behind The Mask* (2010).

## CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

Among the theatrical preoccupation of the post-independence Nigerian literature are themes of war, oppression, economic subjugation, disillusionment, war, politics, and gender disparity. These themes continuously pose questions of Nigeria statehood. The amalgamation of the nation state of Nigeria in 1914 by Lord Lugard and subsequent colonization of Nigeria by the European imperialists disorganized the people with different beliefs and culture. Sadly, the process of amalgamation and colonization was done at the behest of the Europeans without consent of the people. This has resulted to untold consequences which threaten the well-being of the people. Ojo (2014:2) opines that:

The unjust and unequal sharing of socio-political and geographical landscape unintentionally manufactured by British administration that called for Northern region domination, leaving the Southern in lassitude in political investment of Nigeria has generated a longstanding debate.

Owolabi (2009:6) maintain that the key problems in Nigerian novels as well as in the Nigerian society is “the result of the unholy alliance of Northern and Southern Nigeria resulting to continuous state of disunity, war general disillusionment, distrust, suspicion among the diverse ethnic groups in the social entity called Nigeria”.

It is a fact that the atmosphere that inspire the formation of Nigeria revolves around her literature. The Nigerian literature is embedded with the characteristics and features of Nigeria either as a state, nation, geographical entity or even nation state. The problems of Nigeria have influenced many literary scholars since 1960 as they tend to question through the rudiment of literature

the sorry state of Nigeria. These problems are the corpus of the emerging realities associated with Nigeria literature. There is no gainsaying the fact that literature represent the ills of the society and some of the ills include oppressive tendencies which have negative effects on the people and the society. According to Justice Ogunne (2017:170):

This condition gave rise to a category of novels sometimes referred to as post-independence novels. Focusing on this phase of history, writers began to use their works to expose the bad governance of their individual countries.... Literature has always served as a response to the communal needs of the people at any point in time.

In order to expose and address negative issues plaguing Nigeria and Nigerians, the Nigerian literature especially post-independence Nigerian literature has through several literary works showcased subjugation of the masses as well as inspiring the masses to revolt for change which is often called resistance literature. The main objective of this study is to underline the adequate presentation of literary techniques in the selected novels. In the making of this research, it is pertinent to state that this study has explored the Nigerian predicament as seen in the selected novels using the genre of prose fiction.

With the disillusionment that arose immediately after the attainment of self rule in Nigeria from British colonialism, brings us to the prevailing discernment that recent literary scholars of Nigerian literature have through their literary works show the need for the people to resist oppressive tendencies militating against the people. Indeed, reading emerging novels of Nigerian literature can be very disorienting. Nigerian novels highlight tragic events and

circumstances. Nigerian novelists of the resistance literature mould offers their literary works based on innate sense of disorder and chaos. The novelists interpret the Nigerian society by perception and experience of the people in comparison to the idealized world.

The characters in the selected novels for this study allow us to compare and contrast their experiences through objective mindset; they interpret their difficulties without significant embellishment. The characters allow us to gather information on our own perception. Clearly, the main thrust of the five novelists is their characters struggling against manmade disasters resulting from misuse of political governance. The writers like the characters and readers are horrified by the conduct of the rulers. The novels have strong sense of chaos. However, irresponsible rulership of the rulers could not hinder the characters quest for freedom. This is the direction which Nigerian literature is responding to currently.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research utilized the sociological approach to literature. The sociological approach to literature analyzes literary works from the perspective of showing the consciousness of the writers, characters in the literary works and the masses demanding class-less societies where the rights and privileges of the people is guaranteed. As disturbing as the disillusionment features of African nay Nigeria literature, there is the abiding consciousness of the writers and critics to capture the sorry predicament of the people and in some cases suggest ways the people can remedy the terrible situations. Armed with the belief that literature is the product of the society, the Nigerian novel has in one way or the other captured subjugation of the people

Notably, the novels used for this research presents the negative issues militating against the people in post independent Nigerian society. In their representations, we find the consequences of bad governance in all ramifications. There is no doubt that post-independent Nigerian literature is dominated by disillusionment of the people against their African indigenous rulers which has informed thematic preoccupation of the Nigerian literature. Through this thematic engagement, the writers galvanized the people to resist oppression against them. So, the novels mentioned in this research paper are basically social force and ideological weapons against oppressive tendencies from the ruler and society. Nigerian literature depicting disillusionment abounds in what some scholars will refer to as protest literature. Protest literatures are literary works replete with fight against oppressive forces in the society.

Generally, some writers who choose to represent imageries of disillusionment as consequence of bad leadership of Africa have in their literary works proven to be radical. This idea of radicalism is to prevent future occurrence. Hence, the thematic concern of the literary works chosen for this research run through the experience of the characters as well as the novelists inculcating resistance ideologies on the characters. That is the novels used for this study show the extent which bad governance and its consequences have not only deterred the well-being of the people and society but advance the need for resistance by the people.

This study primary aim to show the literary devices in the various novels and how the use of the literary devices remarkably enhance literary quality, comprehension and meaning helping readers to adequately understand literary aesthetic of the novels used for this research.



## STYLE AND TECHNIQUES IN THE SELECTED NOVELS

The literary devices and the representation of meaning utilized by the five writers constitute the major aesthetic influence in the six novels. Literary techniques are standardized methods writers use to convey and enhance their literary works. Literary techniques help writers to create the required effect. Tanure Ojaide, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh, Helon Habila, and Florence Orabueze use of literary techniques is discussed below:

### Satire

There is adequate usage of satire in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*. Tanure Ojaide aptly describes the predicament of the people as the crude oil which could have been used for the benefit of the citizenry becomes their doom. The federal government of Nigeria oftentimes hike the price of petroleum products which emasculate and further alienate the people from the supposedly benefit of crude oil. Tanure Ojaide portrays how influential individuals join in the economic subjugation of the people. To Ojaide, the issue of revenue sharing formula in the country is not favourable to crude oil producing areas as the majority ethnic group gang up to perpetuate bad economic policies against them as can be seen in Chief Ishaka's viewpoint, "The majority group were rivals and even hostile to each other, but they are united on one side, and that was in ganging up against the minority groups from whose area ninety-five percent of the nation's revenue is derived" (160). With this, Tanure Ojaide is of the view that revenue sharing for the crude oil producing areas should reflect equity to soothe the feelings of the people.

Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *The Presidential Handshake* depicts Nigeria as slothful and exposes the overwhelming disillusionment and ineptitude that envelop the country. The novel is a sad commentary on Nigeria's underdevelopment and her inability to rise to the challenges of nationhood. Suffice to say that satire is a principal tool with which Ngozi Chuma-Udeh lashes at the multitudinous socio-economic and political malaise that afflicts Nigeria and the African continent:

The birds had to survive too. They were, of course not the cause of the ill maintenance of the School Hall. They simply capitalized on the faults in the human system to survive. Did they not say that nature abhors a vacuum? The absurdity of the political inclination in the country had led to the placement of emphasis where it was least needed. Huge sums of the country's budget went into trivialities such as sports and sundry schemes while the most significant sectors remained grossly neglected (3).

Helon Habila's *Waiting For An Angel* shows the terrible suffering, disillusionment, exploitation, fear, death of the people originating from the tyrannical rule of the military junta during the dark days of General Ibrahim Babaginda and General Sani Abacha infamous reign in Nigeria. The novel depicts the insensitivity of the rulers juxtaposed with resistance of the oppressed masses struggling to survive amidst the challenges of those years:

This is just one instance. If you care to look, you'll find more: ethnicity, religion, poverty. One General goes, another one comes but the people remain stuck in the same vicious

groove. Nothing ever changes for them except the particular details of their wretchedness. They've lost all faith in the government's unending transition programmes .... But that should not stop us from dreaming .... I realized why it is important to agitate against injustice, no matter the consequence (108, 164 and 165).

Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Teachers On Strike* is a biting satire of the callous insensitivity of the rulers against the masses of Nigeria. The novel mirrors the crass embezzlement of public fund to the detriment of the people. The novel exposes issues such as greed, corruption, moral decadence, poverty, disenchantment, disillusionment, fear, which tend to undermine the well being of the people:

These were not the angry faces that called for the strike. No .... anger would be a luxury to these faces. The effort to muster up the adrenaline necessary for anger would be a herculean task to these suffering faces. These faces were all laden with the trauma of hunger and deprivation (30).

Florence Orabueze in *Men Behind The Masks* aptly describes the predicament of the people as the wealth of the nation which could have been use for the benefit of the people is looted and plundered. The ruling classes, in collaboration with internal and external collaborators, emasculate and alienate the people.

.... Those who use their social positions in and out of government to loot public funds. The criminals that sign inflated contracts, the worms that sign billions of naira for unaccepted contracts, the maggots

that transfer to overseas banks money meant for the supply of goods for the public good, those are the men behind the masks. The leeches that milk this country dry, the termites that make it impossible for you and me to exist as free citizen of this country, the vampires that feed fat on the main dish and leave you the crumbs; those are the real men behind the masks (112).

### Imagery

The images in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* is that of economic and environmental despoliation of the Niger Delta environment. Using flora and fauna imagery, Ojaide expresses the destruction of Niger Delta as result of the activities of oil companies. The natural ecology of the Niger Delta region has become tainted and degraded by environmental pollution, "The Uto River was literally burning. Evergreen plants, dry leaves, and shrubs that stood by the river all became combustible materials. The poisonous methane gas fumes engulfed plants, wildlife, and humans around for days" (204).

The images highlighted by Tanure Ojaide in *The Activist* reflects negative attitude of oil companies and the government towards environmental sustainability of the Niger Delta region, disregarding the importance of compensating the people in the event of environmental pollution and fashioning out ways of preventing future re-occurrence of environmental pollution. The images in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *The Presidential Handshake* are exposure of negative politics and the roles the people play to perpetuate bad governance in the society. In this novel, the novelist creates real life situation and the level of decay prevailing in the polity. The masses are shown to be passive

collaborators and enablers of the decadence manifesting in the society. *The Presidential Handshake* highlights the efforts of Nebe to remedy such calamitous attitude of the rulers and the ruled.

“The teacher yearned to be free. Free like the birds. He wanted a utopian experience where freedom of thought and speech would be the guiding code. He yearned for a free egalitarian society where the air would be as free and fresh as that in the aerial domain of the birds” (3).

Imagery of agonising terror, victimisation, slavery imposed on Nigerians by the military regime abound in Helon Habila’s *Waiting For An Angel*. We see arrest, detention of innocent people without trial, suffering condition and the resistance of the people. This novel connotes hope in an increasing hopeless world, a world filled with sorrow, tears and disillusionment:

The years in prison must have taught him not to hope too much, not to despair too much-that for the prisoner; nothing kills as surely as too much hope or too much despair. He had learned to survive in tiny atoms, piecemeal, a day at a time (32).

Images in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh’s *Teachers On Strike* are those of a post-independence literary work detailing the wicked nature of rulers in Nigeria as seen in the character of the Province Governor, “The opulence of the government conference hall contrasted achingly with the haggard, mournful looking hungry teachers” (36). The images highlighted by Florence Orabueze in *Men Behind The Masks* reflect negative attitude of the rulers, elite and their collaborators towards oppressing the people,

the author shows the insensitivity of the oppressors, “We are the victims of the men behind the masks.... If you don’t know let me tell you that we are the scapegoats for those who siphon millions of the people’s wealth to foreign bank account. We are sacrificial lamb and that’s the way I see it: nothing more, nothing less (205).

### Symbolism

The Activist is the main character and lead figure in Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist*. He epitomises what the people of the Niger Delta desire in their fight against injustice from oil companies and government. With the character of The Activist, Ojaide searches for a replica of what Adaka Boro and Ken Saro Wiwa symbolise to the Niger Delta people. Describing the Niger Delta people as victims of circumstance, Ojaide outlines ways in changing the precarious situation of the people by galvanising them to resist and revolt against the oppressors:

The Niger Delta was part of its people and just as the land, air and rivers were being poisoned, so were the residents themselves, the Activist believed .... Those lakes and wetlands have been filled, first with rubber trees, then new roads and developments that left the people hungry, diseased, malnourished and alienated from their roots (93 and 94).

Like the sterling roles played by Adaka Boro and Ken Saro-Wiwa, The Activist is an agent of resistance and revolutionary change who desires happiness of his people. He directs his anger towards the oppressors. According to him, the situation must change from the present condition of degradation to the better, “There were no neutral grounds; either you

were on one side or the other .... The slave owner and the slave cannot be on the same side. One must be on the side of humanity because “It was cowardly not to choose to take side” (1973). By taking side, The Activist aligns with the people to remedy their situation. First, he enlightens the people on the need for change and also provides avenue for change by establishing a newspaper company as well as contesting for a political position where he can affect the lives of the people positively:

The Activist brought more changes to state government .... He created a Ministry of Environmental and Mineral Matters to deal with many of the problems of the Niger Delta. This was a ministry more than any other that the state needed to harness its natural resources and also to clean the polluted soil, waters, and air and put out fires from gas flares and oil blowouts (318).

In creating the various ministries, The Activist as a political leader revolted against the negative condition of his people as the ministry he created help in repositioning the Niger Delta region for the better. Tanure Ojaide with the creation of the character of The Activist and assigning him revolutionary roles in the novel is insinuating the notion that political leaders from the Niger Delta region should utilise their political positions, power to change the prevailing terrible condition of the region. Ngozi Chuma-Udeh uses symbolism to advance her literary vocation in *The Presidential Handshake*. Nebe symbolises the needed saviour of the people who will save the country and the people. Like The Activist in Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist*, Nebe is a symbolic patriot who believes that Nigeria can be reinvented from the man

made atrocities currently rocking the country:

Just like every other rational citizen of the country, he found himself thorn between two conflicting cosmic fluxes. He was perpetually in the middle of the controversies generated by his infinite search for the true significance of life and that of the prevailing political chaotic trivialities and irrationalities in the country. He felt trapped, helplessly trapped in the country’s bedlam as if he was a rodent caught in a snare (2).

Symbolism is the use of words, images to symbolise specific concepts, people, objects or events. There is adequate use of symbolism in Helon Habila’s *Waiting For An Angel* as seen in:

- i. Amilcar Cabral, Martin Luther King Jnr.; Sankara (Thomas Sankara), Mao (Chairman Mao), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu and Frantz Fanon are revolutionaries who fought for better society and humanity.
- ii. Poverty Street (Morgan Street) symbolize Maroko, Ajegunle areas of Lagos State Nigeria and other parts of Nigeria noted for infrastructural decay, “Poverty Street’s real name was Morgan Street, one of the many decrepit, disease-ridden quarters that dotted the city of Lagos like ringworm on a beggar’s body” (120).
- iii. The ants symbolise Nigerians fleeing Nigeria due to the poor state of the country:

Ants! He shrieked. I turned, alarmed at the near hysteria



in his voice. He was pointing at a long column of black ants passing through below the steps. I had never seen them so thickly profuse before. But it was the start of the rainy season, their period of migration. They are migrating, I said, rinsing my mouth. Bola stood there, rooted staring at them. He turned to me, and now there was renewed urgency in his movements and words (50 and 51)

The teachers in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Teachers On Strike* symbolises the totality of the oppressed masses in the society, they are the downtrodden, the oppressed who are daily confronted by irresponsible leadership prevalent across Africa, "The government is insensitive to the yearnings of the people who voted them into office" (29).

### Allusion

The oil blowout in Roko village in *The Activist* is historical allusion to the Jesse fire incident of October 18, 1998 in Jesse Town in Delta State where high number of people perished in the crude oil pipeline inferno and the negative attitude of government and oil companies to put off the fire. Besides, the Warri crisis (1997 to 2006) captured by Tanure Ojaide in *The Activist* is historical event that happened in Warri, Delta State between the Urhobo, Ijaw and Itsekiri ethnic groups over the fight for largesse from oil companies and government. Another example of allusion in the novel is the protest march led by Ebi and Mrs. Taylor which is usually seen when various women groups in the Niger Delta region participate in countless protest marches to resist and revolt against the oil

companies and government insensitivity in Niger Delta region. Examples of such protest marches are the 2012 Ugborodo (Delta State) women revolt against Chevron Oil Company, the 1984 Ogharaefe (Delta State) women uprising and the Ekpan (Delta State) women protest of 1986.

The death of General Mustapha Ali Dongo in the novel is an allusion to General Sani Abacha, the late military ruler of Nigeria who died in weird circumstances. General Sani Abacha was responsible for the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Niger Delta activists which many believed instigated the present oil-related violence in the Niger Delta region.

Allusion is a reference to well-known person, character, place or event that a writer makes to deepen the reader's understanding of literary work. Helon Habila in *Waiting For An Angel* made us of allusion as seen:

- i. Biblical allusion of Nicodemus (John 3:1-21):

Then on the third day, late in the evening, things began to happen. Like Nicodemus, the superintendent came to him, covertly, seeking knowledge (13).

- ii. Helon Habila was a journalist in Hints magazine. Hints magazine office is located in Allen Avenue, Lagos State, Nigeria. Here, Helon Habila alluded to his days working at Hints magazine using The Dial magazine for emphasis:

Without brushing my teeth, without washing my face or combing my hair, I slipped on my shoes and get out, my manuscript in a folder under

my arm. I took a bus to Allen Avenue. I was going to James Fiki, The Dial's editor. Two years ago (how time flies) he had promised me a job. That had been my first and only time of seeing him. He had met me in my lecturer's office submitting an essay titled 'The Military in Nigerian Politics'. He had sat in a corner, listening to me elaborate on my essay (106).

- iii. Helon Habila use Lomba and James visit to the slave museum in Badagry, Lagos State, Nigeria to support his belief that Nigerians were basically treated as slaves during the military rule in Nigeria:

The word "sleeping" is a misnomer. The slaves couldn't have slept a wink. Imagine them piled in hundreds in this narrow space, chained, tired, broken and wounded: behind them lay family, friends, gods, land, and before them was the vast sea with the coffin-like ship at the anchor, waiting to take them to another place, dark and unknown, and slavery, or maybe death by water. This was really a "sleepless section". No sleep was slept here, and if there was, it was in fits and jerks (195).

### Paradox

That the Niger Delta region is home to Nigeria's wealth and also one of the poorest region in Nigeria and the world is paradoxical as seen in Tanure Ojaide assertion in *The Activist*: "Behind the tall concrete fence, local villagers still fetched

water from Ugunu River, brown from chemicals of oil exploration, for bathing and cooking needs (276). Nigeria is rich in human and material resources but it is paradoxical that Nigeria is home to high number of poverty stricken individuals, infrastructural decay. In fact, igeria is in state of disrepair. Hence, Festus Iyayi in *Violence* use paradox to show his anger:

Oh yes, .... I know that the whole society here stands on trial. I know that there are other people who you could say have greater justification .... people who you could say have enough reason to burn down the present edifice (180).

We often do not realize that it is the society, the type of economic and hence the political system which we are operating in our country today that brutalizes the individual, rapes his manhood .... I feel and think it is necessary that all the oppressed sections of our community ought to take up arms to overthrow the present oppressive system. The system has already proved that it operates through violence (185).

From the characters in *Men Behind The Masks*, the discovery of crude oil in Nigeria is supposed to bring wealth and happiness to the region but the crude oil becomes problematic to the people. Florence Orabueze uses paradox to show negativity of the country's wealth to the people, .... A Professor in his town, Imode, just retired about three years ago, and he was well over sixty before he retired. He could not even build a house in his village before his retirement. He is still driving the brown moving house on four wheels which he brought back from Britain in the early sixties when he was very young" (42).

## Irony

Tanure Ojaide in *The Activist* utilise irony as a literary device to emphasise contrast between the way things are expected to be and the way they are presently. According to *The Activist* in the novel, the present situation is painful to the people. He remembers the past with mixed feelings:

“Whenever my mother wanted to prepare a meal with crayfish, she literally put a pot of water on the fire and took her scooping net and went to the nearby lake to catch fish .... Now, oil companies are pouring poisons into them giving these natural sustainers of the people a death blow” (94)

In this vein, the Niger Delta people are not only struggling against economic subjugation but environmental despoliation of their habitat. For Ngozi Chuma-Udeh, it is ironic that the same masses who are suffering the pangs of bad governance are intentionally and unintentionally enabling their continuous subjugation. In *Teacher On Strike*, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh uses irony to depict the way Nigeria is expected to be and the current condition of Nigeria. It is ironical that despite the huge fund accrued to the state, the state governors refuse to pay teachers their salaries. This is sheer wickedness and injustice:

Nine months of zero income, nine good months of nonpayment of teacher’s salaries had surely taken its toll on him and his colleagues .... All around him people were starving, suffering, dying. His contemporaries had all turned into walking deads (95 – 96).

Florence Orabueze made use of irony to describe issues of infrastructural decay in Nigeria that boasts of abundant human and material resources as seen in *Men Behind The Masks*:

This is show of shame. Every year the budgeting speech allocates millions of naira to health sector but he government hospitals are in shambles .... What a wasteland! So, many die every day in this country because of lack of seriousness of our people and our government. We have just lost our manager because of the indolence and nonchalant attitude that has taken over the whole people (78 and 81).

## Foreshadowing

In *The Activist*, Tanure Ojaide uses foreshadowing to give preview of events that may occur later in the Niger Delta struggle as seen in the participation of *The Activist* in the protest march in Pennsylvania Avenue in United States of America. Many Niger Delta indigenes are currently embarking on instituting court cases against oil companies and the government.

Ojaide predicts that in the course of the struggle, the people will show their disillusionment on issues of oil exploration and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region to the outside world directly in major countries that own the oil companies accused of the rot in the region. This is important because it intensifies the views that the Niger Delta people are beginning to demand justice and equity from their political and traditional leaders by taking revolutionary steps to remedy their appalling condition.

For daring to resist their oppressors, the people are exhibiting traits of revolutionary temperament. Foreshadowing is used to give preview of events that may

occur later as the people struggle against their oppressors. Florence Orabueze evokes the emotion of the people as seen in *Men Behind the Masks*:

It will be marvelous to see Nigeria as a country where love, justice, peace and honesty will be the supreme virtues (271)... The monumental corruption and decay in this country will be removed by the concerted effort of honest and dedicated Nigerians (271).

.... You cannot mop up the mess in this country in just one day, the heap of rubbish did not start accumulating today. It took a lot of time before it reached this neck level that is almost drowning every one of us. It cannot be cleared in one day. It may be something that will be sudden. The people may one day wake up and say that enough is enough (272).

One day the collective will of the people will pull down the barricade erected by the rich (276).

.... The seed of a change in this country has been sowed. You can see that by the number of people in and outside this courtroom. You can see that also by the way they hailed us as heroes .... (281).

I knew that the time for the chasm that separated the rich and the poor to be filled has come. I was happy because the moment of truth is here (283).

Time has come for a change in this nation (290).

### Point of View:

Tanure Ojaide in *The Activist* made use of the omniscient (“all knowing”) narrative technique to provide the characters respective motivation and emotion. It serves as the instrument to relay events of the story and in some instance, the feelings and motive of the characters:

Our people watch their waters turn into poison, their land become crust from blowouts and the air become hot from poisonous gas .... We have to do something and we can .... The paradise of olden days was degenerating fast into a kind of hell.... Something had to be done to detoxify the water so that fish could once more feel safe to breed there (93).

The implication here is that Tanure Ojaide utilises the omniscient point of view to elucidate the notion that the animals are also victims of the activities of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region.

Helon Habila’s *Waiting For An Angel* explores diverse narrative techniques ranging from third person narrative to the diary style. He uses language skillfully to paint picture of people living under military dictatorship, depressed people wanting and expecting an angel of freedom.

### Characterisation

Characters in Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist* are extremely important. Through the characters, the reader is able to grasp the message of the novel. Characters like The Activist, Pere, Omagbemi and Ebi influence the novel. *The Activist* is woven around anger, injustice, disillusionment, and violence against the people and the roles played by *The Activist* to galvanise the



people to revolt for change. According to *The Activist*, “Let Bell Oil and the Federal Military Government stop killing us slowly. We cannot sit and watch our land made unlivable by outsiders. We will continue to fight to handover the land, waters, and air of our birth to our children in a livable state.” (252).

There are two types of characters in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh’s *The Presidential Handshake*. Nebe and the teachers who are desirous of changing the status quo and the other characters who are enablers of the rotten underbelly of the society:

All was not well in the country but these problems crippling the nation would not be solved by running away from them. Realisation dawned on the teacher that the problem in the country emanated from the erroneous perception of the entire society and not wholly from the nation’s polity.

All .... had misconstrued the core essence of governance .... The teacher knew it would be a long journey .... This march for the redemption of the country but there was hope for emancipation through a great deal of capacity building inductions for reorientation of consciousness (352).

.... that is the vogue in the country. The slogan is cheat or be cheated out and I tell you, I will not want my children to be cheated out. The country is becoming a jungle justice arena. Might has become right and the winner takes it all (44).

Helon Habila’s *Waiting For An Angel* is told from the viewpoints of Lomba, other major characters and the narrator. The novel revolves around Lomba. Though, there are other characters in the novel, high

percentage of events in the novel concern Lomba, a journalist living in Lagos State during the brutal military rule. Every character in *Waiting For An Angel* experiences the evil of military rule either directly or indirectly.

In Ngozi Chuma-Udeh’s *Teachers On Strike*, the characters are of two divide, the teachers and others who are morally upright and the governor who is representation of bad rulers. The teachers’ resistance to the evil machination of the governor is noteworthy:

Your Excellency Sir, you are heartless ....Yes, Your Excellency. I realise who I am talking to. I am talking to the head of a *kakistocracy*. I am talking to the murder of posterity. I am talking to an enemy of progress. The archenemy of teachers who have willfully marked them out for extinction (115).

Through the characters in *Men Behind The Masks* Florence Orabueze portrays effects of bad rulers. The characters struggle with development of their identities. Florence Orabueze reveals the portrait of beauty and social destruction of Nigeria and Nigerians, giving pictures and human faces of hardship experience by the people. The characters are major tool the author use to formulate and convey the people predicament.

### **Authorial Intrusion/Surrogate**

Author surrogate is usually the character who speaks for the author either intentionally or unintentionally. He or she is an idealised version of the author. The Activist is Tanure Ojaide’s author surrogate as he assumes the voice which the author (Tanure Ojaide) uses to express his feelings on the Niger Delta predicament:

An oil blowout, exacerbated by a pipe leakage and fuelled by gas flares threw Ekakpamre and its people into unprecedented state of anxiety. Many oil wells dotted their old farmland now abandoned because they had become either a part of security zone, fenced oil installations, or a waste land. From these surface pipe carried crude oil to flow stations. The blaze was savage. At first children ran out to watch it but soon their parents ran to physically drag them from endangering their lives. With strong winds blowing anybody nearby could be engulfed by the flames (240).

Tanure Ojaide with the character of The Activist instigate the people to demand for change from oppression and social injustice. As a Niger Delta indigene, Ojaide uses words that adequately represent environmental destruction of the region.

Nebe is Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's voice in *The Presidential Handshake*. Through him, she lashes at the marauders misleading the country, "This is a call to duty. Come let us salvage our dear country from years of political quandary!" (352).

Lomba is Helon Habila's author surrogate; he is the voice of the author. In fact, Lomba is Helon Habila. *Waiting For An Angel* is Helon Habila's semi-autobiography. Helon Habila who was a journalist during the military junta of General Sani Abacha created this novel to inspire the people to resist and revolt for change, "Here in this country, our dreams are never realized: something always contrives to turn them into a nightmare .... But that should not stop us from dreaming" (164).

There is no doubt that Nebe is the hero of *Teachers On Strike*. As chairman of Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), he is

against the governor's bad leadership. He speaks for the author intentionally or unintentionally, "Nebe was appalled at this ineptitude on the part of the people in power. Why should they be so cruel? So insensitive so morbidly wicked to the plight of the citizenry at large?" (99). Nebe is clearly Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's author surrogate in *Teachers On Strike*.

The characters in *Men Behind The Masks* are Florence Orabueze's author surrogate. The characters idealise the views of the author. As a committed writer, Florence Orabueze intentionally expresses her misgiving against bad rulers and their collaborators subjugating the people:

... But the men and women who man the nation have used cotton wool to plug their ears like dead men. They have also gummed their eyes with plaster in order not to see the evil committed against the citizens of this country. They have also refused to reason with their brains. Their consequences have been sold to the highest bidder in the auction sale. One day, I said one day, the earthquake, the typhoon and the deluge bottled up in the small containers will burst. Then, no force will hold it back (278).

### Tone

The general atmosphere created in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* reflects the continuation of negative activities of the oil companies in collaboration with the government and show of resistance by the people against oil exploration, oil exploitation, oppression and marginalisation of the people. The Niger Delta people see the government and oil companies as

enemies that should be resisted. This is seen in the angry reaction of the students against Professor Tobore Ede. Professor Tobore Ede, the university don though an indigene of the Niger Delta region assumes the role of a mole and hence his violent death. Professor Tobore Ede's death in the hands of the students typifies the prevailing situation in Niger Delta region where violence is the masses weapon to resist and show their disgust to the sad situation. Professor Tobore Ede becomes the sacrificial lamb used to cleanse the Niger Delta region from imperfection created by the oppressors – the Nigeria state and oil companies:

The situation suddenly becomes rowdy and chaotic and, in the commotion that followed, a group of students forced a tire over the don's neck. All of a sudden the ebullient don had become a sacrificial animal that was bound and helpless. The students dragged him outside to the open field, filled the tire with petrol and set him ablaze (180).

Helon Habila's *Waiting For An Angel* is the story of fear, suffering, disillusionment, oppression, corruption and exploitation of the masses. There is palpable fear and reign of terror across the novel.

In Florence Orabueze's *Men Behind The Masks*, the anger exhibited by the people is intensified as the youthful characters vent their anger on their fellow citizens and the society. The suffering in Nigeria is becoming pathetic. In spite of the massive resources across the country, majority of the communities in the country do not have electricity. The roads are death traps, infrastructural decay is visible as educational, health and other public facilities in the country are in terrible state.

In many communities across Nigeria, the people use contaminated water for their daily chore due to pollution. As the people grapple with poverty, environmental and economic malaise, insecurity, oppression, the rulers and their collaborators show indifference to their plight, hence the violence acts across the country:

Nobody is interested to shoot any of you in so far as you don't play smart .... We are armed robbers. Keep quiet if you don't want your head to be blown out from your body. If you obey our command, it is not our intention to hurt any of you .... Lie down all of you and no further movement ....

Antelope, take care of these people. There is no need to shoot anybody. At the same time, don't hesitate to blow into pieces any of them that tries to be smart ....

Shi aaap, woman. Don't make any more noise or this beautiful piece of iron will open up your intestines.... Mr. Okon was on the floor in a pool of his blood.... The leader was not moved by the mangled mass of flesh and blood lying on the floor (113, 114, 115).

## Language

Tanure Ojaide in *The Activist* uses simple language to project meaning in conveying his message thereby creating the required effect and beauty to his novel.

The language of Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *The Presidential Handshake* is simple for the readers to comprehend. There is the use of simple language in Ngozi

Chuma-Udeh's *Teachers On Strike*, adding meaning as well as creating beauty in the novel.

Helon Habila use simple language in crafting *Waiting For An Angel* making the novel easy to read. Florence Orabueze uses simple language in *Men Behind The Masks* to project meaning, conveying her message to create the required effect and add beauty to her novel.

### Use of Proverbs

The importance of proverbs in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* cannot be emphasised. The proverbs are mainly drawn from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, which is the setting of the novel. Most of the proverbs serve the purpose of thematic emphasis. In the novel, the proverb, "You are the moon in the night. No stars will outshine you" (38) emphasises the role of a saviour of the people which The Activist assumes through inculcating in the people the need to demand for change. Also, the proverb, "May the kolanuts and drinks bless your womb so that you can give us plenty of children" (38) confirms the importance of prayer to the ancestors in African traditional society, meaning that the ancestors always answer prayer request of the people. The proverb, "Singing is not a hard task as cultivating cassava" (152) is a truism to the fact that singing and dancing abound in the Niger Delta region as the people use music to enliven their souls from problems of life. There is adequate use of proverbs in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *The Presidential Handshake* as seen in:

- i. "Do not count your chick before they are hatched" (13)
- ii. "A woman, who started cooking first before another, would have more broken cooking pots than the later" (44).

- iii. "The chicken said it cannot afford to get involved in a cudgel fight because it has no head to be bludgeoned" (128).

The following are proverbs in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Teachers On Strike*:

- i. "Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown" (37)
- ii. "The chicken says its shrieks of alarm are not to prevent the predator from carrying away its chick but to alert the public of her predicament" (106).
- iii. "The mosquito said its bite was not intended to kill but to make an impact". (110 – 111).
- iv. "The language of the sands could only be interpreted by the ant" (131).

The proverbs in this novel serve the purpose of thematic emphasis. Florence Orabueze uses the following proverbs in *Men Behind The Masks*:

- i. "Birds of the same plumage must flock together" (46)
- ii. "A snake must eat another snake for it to grow large" (118).

### Use of Pidgin Language

Pidgin Language is widely accepted as means of communication in the Niger Delta region and other parts of Nigeria. Example of pidgin language in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* is seen below:

- i. "E no suppose to be so with plenty money from oil"  
"Soja don steal all our money"  
"Water don pass garri for here"  
"We dey inside fire. If e no better, na die –o" (10).
- ii. "You nor fit be somebody for dis country now unless you steal



“All the big man be thief” (11).

Here, Tanure Ojaide affirms that corruption is the major impediment to sustainability of the Niger Delta region. The Niger Delta oil wealth power the country. Yet, the region is noted for infrastructural decay. There is the use of Pidgin Language in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh’s *The Presidential Handshake* as seen below:

“.... The market de too inside, people no go de come buy well well. For under the bridge, everybody dey stop buy. Travelers dey stop, workers dey cross over to buy” (141).

See the use of Pidgin Language in Helon Habila’s *Waiting For An Angel* as shown below:

- i. “Where you think say you dey carry am go?” (11).
- ii. “But make I tell you something – you dey laugh at the wrong people. Make you go laugh at all the big big Generals who dey steal our country money every day de send am to foreign banks while their country de die of poverty and disease. Dem de drive long long motor cars with escort while I no even get two legs to walk on. I, a hero. I fight” (135)
- iii. “No be her fault. This thing for no happen if to say I get money .... No be her fault. Na poverty cause am” (135).

There is adequate use of Pidgin Language in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh’s *Teachers On Strike*:

- i. “Teacher, this no be school, as una no wan teach again, una fit commot this cranky for road? Na we dey own una salary? Hunger men” (52).

- ii. “He no gree pay me, this fool no want pay bus money” (64).
- iii. “Then pay me this money. Pay me his money now now” (65).
- iv. “I will setre you fine fine” (48).
- v. “I go give you money wey pass your salary well well” (49).
- vi. “Miss say something now, flee accommodation flee saraly, everything flee flee. I wirri buy you a car, just tee me your bland” (49).
- vii. “Kakistocracy” (115).

### Use of Local Words

Tenure Ojaide made use of local words to relate *The Activist* to the Niger Delta region. In *The Activist*, the characters bear names like Utoro, Ovwode, Pere, Ebi, Torukpa, Vhopheri which are popular names in the Niger Delta region.

Also, Uhaghwa (god of songs), Udje song (songs use to lament human foibles and follies), Ajagbodudu (a town in Urhobo speaking area of Delta State) and Okwagbe river (a river in Okwagbe town in Delta State known for its spiritual fertility especially for childless couples childless). These local words highlight the locale where the story is based. Note the use of local words in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh’s *Teachers On Strike*: Ogbono soup (53).

### Stream of Consciousness

In literature, Stream of Consciousness is a method of narration that describes in words the flow of thoughts in the minds of the characters. It is a style of writing developed by writers aimed at expressing in words the flow of a character’s thoughts and feelings in their minds. These techniques aspire to give readers the impression of being inside the mind of the character. Example of Stream of Consciousness in Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist* is seen as The Activist ponders on the fate of the Niger Delta people:

There are too many hungry people going to bed at night, even as too many rich throw away leftover that would have fed the hungry .... There are too many homeless people sleeping under flyover bridges .... There is too much oppression of the minority in the name of democracy in many countries (18).

It is pertinent to state that Tanure Ojaide social consciousness in *The Activist* is the motivating factor in the novel. He passionately implores the Niger Delta people to resist against the negative effects of oil exploration and exploitation in Niger Delta region.

### Use of Igbo words

Note Igbo words in Ngozi Chuma-Ude's

*The Presidential Handshake*:

- i. "Ikuku ama n'onya! – The wind that never got caught in a trap" – (168)
- ii. "Ndichie – Elders" (207).
- iii. "Tufiakwa – God Forbid" (289).

### Use of Flashback

In Helon Habila's *Waiting For An Angel*, the past incident of the encounter between Lomba and Alice is recreated in the mind of Lomba while in prison two years after:

Hate you, could I? You were the idol of my idolatry. And even now, two years later, in my prison cell, as I look at the picture of you beside Ngai, in your wedding gown, all I can think of is the feel of your lips on mine when you kissed me that night before leaving me on the log under the nim tree (100).

### Use of Faction

In *Waiting For An Angel*, Helon Habila mix facts and fiction (faction) in creating this novel. Dele Giwa, Moshood Kolawole Abiola, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Helon Habila, Toni Kan, Nduka Otiono, Maik Nwosu, Chiedu Ezeanah, Obi Nwakanma, Mike Jimoh are real names of writers, journalists and activists of Nigerian origin who resisted and revolted against the military rulers. The use of faction gives this novel a true identity.

### Semantic

Helon Habila in *Waiting For An Angel* use "Angel" to expose evil features of military rule in Nigeria noted for tyranny and dictatorship. Here, "Angel" connotes "Israfael", the "Angel" of death:

You are lucky, not many people are given that privilege. You'll also see Israfael, the Angel of Death, when he comes for you ....

The angel of Death is in my neighbourhood, and soon it will be my turn. But not in such an ignoble fashion.... If only I had a way of choosing the manner of my own death, if only I could make it spectacular and momentous .... (39, 40 and 41).

The sudden death of General Sani Abacha on 8 June 1998 ended his brutal military rule in Nigeria and there were hope that Nigeria will witness new dawn, "What this story tries to do is to capture the mood of those years, especially the Abacha years: the despair, the frenzy, the stubborn hope, but above all airless prison-like atmosphere that characterised them" (228).

### Shifting Narration

Helon Habila *Waiting For An Angel* has seven interconnected episodes named after the narrator and major characters. The novel's different narratives form a single great narrative. Helon Habila use of shifting narration immerses the reader through the terrible experiences of people resisting and revolting against tyrannical military rulers. The central theme of this novel revolves around the characters lives under brutal military dictatorship.

### Deus ex Machina

Deus ex Machina is a literary device in which a person or thing appears or is suddenly or unexpectedly introduced into a story to provide solution for a previous difficulty. This is seen in Helon Habila's *Waiting For An Angel*:

My movement is too fast for the soldiers because he isn't expecting it. In one motion I shove the table at him; the edge catches him in the stomach, knocking the gun out of his hands. He falls down on the floor amidst the broken glasses. I make a desperate rush for the door, but before I reach it I hear a warning bark: Stop or I Shoot!

But when I turn it is not a soldier standing there. It is an angel. It opens its enormous wings and closes them again in a clapping motion. The air from the wings lifts me up and carries me out through the door. I land with a splash on the wet street (43).

### CONCLUSION

This study reveals that form is not detachable from content in literature. Rather, form and content are literary tools in making literary works memorable and enduring.

Among the literary devices used in the five selected novels are characterization and satire. Characterisation plays important roles in the novels. Through the characters, the reader is able to grasp the message and arrive at some critical inference. The four writers also made use of satire as they employ satire to structure their literary works. Satire serves as pathway to understanding the respective novels.

### REFERENCES

- Asika, I. E. (2021, March 9). The portrait of a writer as a wordsmith discourse *techniques in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. Retrieved from <http://www.viewpointnigerianliterature.org>, on March 2, 2024.
- Barber, K. (1995). African-language literature and postcolonial criticism. *Research in African Literatures*, 26(4), 3-30.
- Barton, E.J. (2004). *A contemporary guide to literary terms*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishers.
- Chuma-Udeh, Ngozi. (2005). *Teachers on strike*. Africana First Publishers.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2013). *The presidential handshake*. Rex Charles and Patrick Ltd.
- Emenyonu, E.E. (2006). *New directions in African literature*. James Currey.
- Habila, Helon. (2002). *Waiting for an angel*. Penguin Books.
- Khamis, A.M. (2000). The heterogeneity of Swahili literature. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 9(2), 11-21.

Mulokozi, M.M. (1992). A survey of Kiswahili literature: 1970 – 1988. *Afrika Focus*, 8(1), 49 – 61.

Newell, S. (2006). *West African literatures: Ways of reading*. Oxford University Press.

Nkume, J. (2023). Outline of literary devices in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Retrieved from <http://www.viewpointnigerialiterature.org>, on March 2, 2024.

Ojaide, T. (2006). *The activist*. Farafina.

Ojo, J. (2014). Prehendalism, socio-linguistic and ethnic politics: The bane of Nigerian democracy. *International Journal of Policies and Good Governance*, 5(5), 1-21

Orabueze, F. (2010). *Men behind the masks*. Afro-Orbis Publishing Co. Ltd.

Otunne, J. N. (2017). Are writers still “righting?” A moral perspective to Adichie’s *Americanah*. *UNIZIK Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 18(3), 168-192.

Owolabi, B. (2009, April 4). *The importance of literary techniques in prose fiction*. Retrieved from <http://www.viewpointliterature.org>, on July 168, 2024.

Turco, L. (1999). *The book of literary terms*. University Press of New England (UPNE).