

LITERATURE EDUCATION AS A PANACEA FOR CYBER CRIME IN NIGERIA: A TEST CASE OF ADAOBI TRICIA NWAUBANI'S *I DO NOT COME TO YOU BY CHANCE*

Bizuum Godwill Yadok¹ & Ene Ann Edache²

¹Department of English, Federal University of Education Pankshin, Plateau State, Nigeria

²Department of English and Literary Studies, Federal University of Lafia, Nassarawa State

Abstract

Literature education is often confined to the language arts or language education whereas all the creative expressions embedded in literature reflect the generality of the society. This means that students at all levels could tap from the indirect, leisure-oriented education which literature offers in almost the same measure children inculcate moral values from the simple exciting art of storytelling. Literature in all its genres offers an interesting way of learning and social orientation. To properly explicate this notion, the author of this paper has selected Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* to demonstrate literature's capacity for creating awareness on the artifices of cyber criminals in Nigeria popularly known as Yahoo-Yahoo. Cybercrime in Nigeria is one of the factors that affect Nigeria's reputation in the committee of nations. To interrogate the text, the post-colonial literary theory is engaged. The findings of the paper indicate that even though ill-gotten wealth, in this case through cybercrime, brings attention of the public, it does not give one any sense of fulfilment. Moreover, there are still many people in the society that frown at excessive materialism and such people can not trade their love for it. The findings of the paper have helped to shed more light on the menace of cybercrime and the imperative of its avoidance. On a larger scale, it buttresses the relevance of literature education at all levels of education, considering the pedagogical utility of literature to societal growth and development.

Keywords: Literature, Cybercrime, Education, Post-colonialism, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani

Introduction

The perception of literature is often limited to its being a subject in the secondary school or the university, and sometimes it is often regarded as leisure study. However, what many fail to realise is that literature is life itself, also considering the fact that it reflects life and the society. Al-Bishak contends that literature is "commonly understood within literary circles as works of imagination expressed in the figurative language" (2019: p.346). The imaginative side of literature does not negate its mirroring of life as Nwajiaku (2020) maintains that a literary work does not occur in a vacuum neither is it inspired by nothingness but that "the writer strives to present his works as a special kind of mirror through which we can see ourselves even more clearly and more vividly than an ordinary mirror" (p.358). In corroboration, Onyenbuenyi and Onyerionwu (2020) add that the writer has the responsibility of drawing society's attention to the ills or progresses made by the same society in order for the society to make adjustments where necessary.

In pre-colonial times, African literature existed in the oral tradition where the genres of prose, drama, and poetry aptly correspond to the spoken form, the performance form, and the sung form of the oral tradition. Most importantly, as Chinua Achebe (1975) advocates, literature (particularly African Literature) has always been in the service of man. This means that through literature, the African has been able to instill moral values, perpetuate traditions, educate the people, orientate the society and provide a direction for

change or growth of every society as the case may be. Fafunwa (1971) admits that the oral tradition in primordial Africa, which was a mish-mash of literature and education, was a valid means of imparting knowledge before the coming of the Europeans and by this, it is safe to say that literature was and still is education itself. Literature hardly discriminates against any subject-matter or theme that is tucked into its belly by its writer or composer as long as it is marinated in an aesthetic language or performative material. Unlike other forms of knowledge which require measured outcomes, that of literature comes perniciously but it is wholistic when it becomes evident. For example, knowledge of empathy, history, wisdom, commonsense, bits from varied professional fields, and more are not usually demanded from students or pupils but literature seeks to endow individuals with such education which can only be realized when such they have been *made* or become thoroughly knowledgeable. Thus, literature helps to teach one what may never be taught in a classroom and yet its education does not come with the pressure or rigour of internalizing formulas or concepts that accompany other fields of knowledge. Interestingly, beyond books, literature could also come in the form of jokes, oral stories, songs, films, rhetoric and the like. Yet, its goal of subtle education is always achieved.

From the foregoing, literature is ubiquitous in the informal educational setting but its appearance is quite limited in the formal educational setting. For example, there is a provision for literature at the junior secondary level but that provision suffers from a thin and discordant curriculum across Nigeria in addition to the fact that it is not a core subject area. In the senior secondary school, it is restricted to the arts class and even there it is not a compulsory subject. At the university level, it is merged with the English language course and still restricted to the department if not for its presence as an elective to arts or law students. Its demand gets narrower as one ascends the higher levels of university education. On the contrary, there is a small presence of literature at the primary level but it is markedly absent at the foundational level but some scholars aver that literature is present at the foundational and primary levels just that it is merged with the English language. This may also be attributed to the negligence of local writers to the needs of the local audience. Nonetheless, a good piece of literature must speak to the needs of the environment from which it was birthed. Apparently, there is a response in this regard, judging from the literary productions emanating out of contemporary Africa, particularly Nigeria. This is also because, as Helen Chukwuma observes:

“Literacy in the present age is becoming more complex with the speedy demands of information technology. Globalisation and multiculturalism have broken down the barriers of solitude and isolation. African literature, having emerged from the difficulties of the past, urgently needs to continue the momentum by rendering our literature more visible and accessible (2011: 69)”.

Al-Bishak (2019) avers that contemporary Nigerian literature concerns itself with the happenings reflected by Nigerian literary artists. By his definition, what should be termed as “contemporary” covers a corpus churned out by Nigerian literary writers within the last 35 years. Within the bounds of this reasoning, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* comes as an excellent example of contemporary Nigerian literature. The book was first published in 2009, during the fourth republic in Nigeria; a period which witnessed rapid globalization owing to the phenomenal evolution of digital technology across the globe. In spite of the fact that advance fee fraud otherwise known as 419 was already a known shoddy practice by criminals in Nigeria, its representation in fiction was hardly felt until the publication of Nwaubani’s debut novel, *I Do Not Come to*

You by Chance. The book reflects the internet scam that was launched and spread widely within the 21st Century Nigeria, which is commonly known as Yahoo-yahoo. Commenting on the responsibility of the twenty-first century Nigerian writer, Onyebuenyi and Onyerionwu (2020) state that “the Nigerian writer can now invoke the powers of his fundamental human rights to compose his creative faculties to pursue a national development agenda” (P.374). Tsaaor (2010) concurs with this position by adding that contemporary Nigerian literature “should be involved in the conversation on National retrieval” (p. 45). It is important to state the Yahoo-yahoo or e-fraud is still a common practice by Nigerian youths and it has increased in magnitude since the last one and half decades. The author, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, is a graduate of psychology at the prestigious University of Ibadan, Nigeria and she has worked as a journalist and a freelance writer. Her second book, *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* has fetched her awards as did her debut novel. She happens to be born in the generation that witnessed the trends in criminal culture catalysed by the rapid information communication technology of the twenty-first century. Using, Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, the authors of this paper aim to show how literature can indeed be used as a panacea for cyber crime in Nigeria, principally by exposing common antics of cyber criminals. The study employs the postcolonial literary theory in its espousal of the text which also explains the “how” and “why” of cyber crime especially in Nigeria which is being considered as the headquarters of internet scam in Africa, and perhaps the whole world.

Synopsis of Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*

Most cases of cyber fraud in Nigeria occur in the southern part of the country. Therefore, the novel in focus did not go far from there. It is set in the southeastern part of Nigeria, precisely Abia State and in the cities of Umuahia and Aba. The book begins with Augustina’s story in the prologue; her coming to the city and meeting an engineer who returns from overseas and falls in love with her leading to a marital union. The first chapter of the book, however, substitutes her with her first son, Kingsley Onyeagalawanneya Ibe also known as Kings. Kingsley grows into a hardworking, responsible and obedient child but upon graduating from the university with flying colours he is confronted with one of Nigeria’s monsters – unemployment. Accompanying unemployment are dwindling resources from his family owing to failing economy, the sickness of his father, and a collapsing relationship between him and the love of his life, Ola. He hits rock bottom in the quest to find money to treat his ailing father and he is forced to visit his wealthy maternal uncle, Boniface, who is popularly known as Cash Daddy. Rumour has it that Cash Daddy is an internet fraudster and Kingsley does not just confirm it but is wooed to join him. Not long afterwards, Kingsley finally loses Ola to a wealthy business mogul and his father dies. Boniface comes to their aid by settling existing debts, renovating Kingsley’s father’s house in the village, and sponsoring a pomp burial ceremony in line with the Igbo tradition. Kingsley finally submits his intellectual creative acumen to the service of Boniface’s 419 enterprise. Big spending is the middle name of Cash Daddy and he spares no room for remorse about his victims who are mostly foreigners. He succeeds in convincing a foot-dragging Kingsley about the superiority of materialism to idealism and any other kind of consciousness. Thus, Kingsley’s fortunes are turned around and he is able to finance his siblings’ education without stress. Other perks include traveling around the world, wearing designer clothes and changing young girls like diapers. However, his mother remains his voice of conscience and, as much as he tries to avoid her, she is stuck to his head. Eventually, things begin to crumble for

Kingsley starting with the death of Azuka, his bad-lucked mate at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) – a moniker for Cash Daddy’s Squad of cyber fraudsters. Merit, his new found love, abandons him upon the realization that he is an internet scammer. However, his biggest misfortune is brought about by the sudden death of Cash Daddy who, until then, was a gubernatorial aspirant marked for a win. Nonetheless, the misfortunes bring about his turnaround and his jettisoning of illicit business as it is seen in the epilogue where, once again, his mother assumes the central role. The author makes a subtle case for cyber fraud yet in louder voice she condemns it. In any case, the author’s storytelling prowess is not in doubt, it hardly strikes as first novel. To further spice up the story, the author generously sprinkles grains of humour on almost every page. Apart from the glaring theme of internet fraud, other supporting themes like unemployment, materialism, a comatose health system, love, and death feature prominently in the text as well.

Theoretical Framework – Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is not just a way of speculating meaning from African literary texts, especially of English expression, but it is also a valid means of interpreting the African reality of the present day. The postcolonial theory arrived as a fitting way of understanding the condition of the postcolonial. In their seminal work on postcolonial criticism, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice of Postcolonial Criticism*, Ashcroft et al (2001) outline four critical models of postcolonial literatures namely: national and regional models; race based models; comparative models of varying complexity; and more comprehensive comparative models. Furthermore, common concepts of postcolonial studies like mimicry and hybridity will be integrated into the discourse. However, this paper is hinged on the national and regional model which accounts for shared culture and experiences of a people within the same region or nation as well as their peculiar problems and challenges. The literature is considered in relation to the social and political history and it serves as a source for creating national identity. What the author and most of the characters share in common is that they are Nigerians and it is quite imperative to understand the story and even the language (Nigerian English) from the national prism. In addition to the regional or national model, Shija (2013) opines that postcolonial criticism is also concerned with issues like immigration, terrorism, cyber-crime, ethnic cleansing, human rights, ethnicity and military adventurism.

***I Do Not Come to You by Chance* as an Exposé on Cyber-Crime in Nigeria**

The indispensable role of literature in every strata or sphere of the society needs to be continually iterated lest it becomes neglected. Nwajiaku (2020) asserts that “literature from all indications (in Nigeria and on the African Continent) does not aspire to serve merely aesthetic or solely entertainment purposes” (p.367). In Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, for example, beyond the flowery language and numerous pockets of humour, there is a salient motif of the Yahoo-Yahoo conundrum which pulls the attention of the reader. This is a discussion that must be had in the contemporary Nigerian setting. Perhaps this also informs Omagu and Okun’s opinion that Nwaubani’s debut novel “does not only capture the Nigerian social realism, which copiously explored as fictional verisimilitude; it also explores the complex and seamy underbelly of a growing existentialist ideal known locally as ‘Yahoo’ and globally as internet scam.” (2024, p.8303) The text tacitly explains how unsuspecting victims, also known as *mugus*, are lured into the trap of internet fraudsters, where they are continually milked of their resources while they (the victims) hold tenaciously to the gambler’s fallacy. The process through which these fraudsters cast their deceptive net on the internet is called “phishing.”

They usually harvest hundreds or even thousands of emails from online repositories and then send them messages that will require the potential victim's help in exchange for rewards that could run into millions of dollars or pounds. When Kingsley, in the text under focus, writes his emails to hook victims, he begins by saying, "DEAR. . . I DO NOT COME TO YOU BY CHANCE. . . ." He writes in capital letters emphasizing that the email is intentional and that the block letters also express his desperation for help and a once-in-lifetime opportunity for the recipient of the message to have his fortunes changed for good. With some luck, he extends the discourse by becoming more personal as could be seen in the excerpt below:

DEAR FRIEND,
THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR RESPONSE TO MY DEAR SISTER'S EMAIL. YES, MR. HOOVERSON. IF YOU HELP US WITH THE TRANSACTION. WE WILL GIVE YOU 20% WHICH COMES TO 11.6 MILLION (ELEVEN MILLION SIX HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS). I HOPE THIS AMOUNT IS SATISFACTORY. MY HOOVERSON, FROM NOW ON, BOTH OF US MUST WORK AS A VERY CLOSE TEAM. I HEREBY SUGGEST THAT WE CHOOSE A CODE WHICH SHALL PRECEDE EVERY ONE OF OUR CORRESPONDENCES. ALUTA CONTINUA IS MY SUGGESTION, UNLESS OF COURSE YOU HAVE ANOTHER PREFERENCE. THIS IS MY CODE NAME OF CHOICE OWING TO THE FACT THAT MY FAMILY IS CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN A STRUGGLE AGAINST INJUSTICE (p.127-128).

It is instructive to note that internet fraudsters operate as a cartel with their partners scattered across the globe with the ability to generate almost every kind of believable sensitive document in case the victim at the other end is doing his due diligence. This gives room for little doubt in the process of a transaction. As mentioned earlier, nearly all their victims are either white Americans or Europeans with the financial capacity to meet their needs. This practice, initially, makes Kingsley uncomfortable but Cash Daddy is quick to wipe off traces of guilt from his mind in the dialogue excerpted from page 204 below:

(Cash Daddy) "You, you went to school. Did they teach you about slave trade?"

(Kingsley) "They did"

(Cash Daddy) "Who were the people behind it? And all the things they stole from Africa, have they paid us back? . . .since you don't appreciate this opportunity God has given you to abolish poverty in your family. . . ."

This explains why the scammers hardly look back whenever they exploit their victims and, perhaps, why they spend in the same reckless measure. Quite ironically, the internet fraudsters could be very generous towards humanitarian courses and also to religious organizations in ways that endears them to the heart of the locals. Generally, they live very lavish ostentatious lifestyles that make many to question their wealth. Such an example in real life is one Ramon Abbas, popularly known as Hushpuppy and one Invictus Obi, both of whom are serving sentences in U.S prisons. Here in Nigeria, their types and accomplices are even celebrated. It is not surprising that a song extolling the lifestyle of internet scammers made waves in 2007 in Nigeria—"Yahooze" by Olu Maintain. Similarly, one of the biggest music labels in Nigeria steered by popular Nigerian music star, Olamide is called YBNL, which stands for "Yahoo Boy No Laptop". The craze for wealth in Nigeria's current dispensation pays high premium on Yahoo and other illicit practices against education and other honest means of acquiring riches. It is so bad that a related

name for fraud and ritual practices in order to make money is now known as “Yahoo Plus”. This valorization of materialism, egotism, and class consciousness in a postcolonial Nigerian setting is inimical to national growth because it relegates the virtues that matter (Olumide 2014).

Role of Literature Education as a Panacea for Cyber-Crime in Nigeria

As mentioned earlier, Nigeria appears to be the hub of cyber-crime in Africa, if not the world entirely, because many internet fraudsters are discovered to be Nigerians. Unfortunately, the film and the music industries – two critical industries for cultural orientation – help in further propagating the ostentation that come with internet crime. Nigerian literature, being a more conscientious means of cultural production charts a crusade against cyber-crime but its voice seems too faint to be heard considering the paltry literary materials that are themed on cyber-crime in contrast to its prevalence in the society. It behoves on Nigerian authors to produce more literary materials that touch on the Yahoo subject and these books should be tailored for all levels of education right from the foundational level of education to the peak of highest level of education. We need more poems and plays that condemn the Yahoo-Yahoo practice in Nigeria in an effort to reclaim the dignity of the nation in a postcolonial dispensation. Olumide (2014) avers that “Yahoo-Yahoo is a manifestation of materialism which rides on the back of postmodernity,” however, he warns that, “the practice should be understood but not excused or rationalized.” Literature should not simply condemn negative behaviours in the society but should also provide alternatives as Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani does in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* in the sense that Kingsley eventually redeems himself and instead of the internet scam he runs a cyber café where people come to browse and do legitimate business. The mother becomes proud of her son. It is not enough to condemn but it is also important for writers to show other paths to success so that the reading public can glean from such examples. Ride (2021) states that the theme of a good person (like Kingsley) tempted by circumstances to do bad things is not a new one in Literature but reclaiming the goodness of the major character is one of the hallmarks of Adaobi Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. Tsaaor (2010) advises that in “whatever we are doing as cultural practitioners, not just as literary activists, we must ensure that Nigeria is positively projected” (p.49). Any literary material with cyber-crime or cyber-ethics as its thrust appropriated to any level of education must be employed by teachers, especially literature teachers, to teach students, cautioning them against harmful practices and opening up their minds to the rewards and the thousands of possibilities that occur in a period of rapid digital technological growth like ours.

Conclusion

The impact of literature as a pedagogical tool at all levels of education within the formal and informal educational sector can hardly be disputed. Even in the Bible, Jesus made use of parables (earthly stories with spiritual implication) to teach his disciples and the people. That marks a clear instance of literature put into use for behavioural change. In the same measure, all forms of literature can be harnessed for value or societal orientation. This beckons the inextricable relationship between both writers and readers, as Onyebuanyi and Onyerionwu (2020) advise that, “the Nigerian writer of the twenty-first century needs a reading Nigerian public to join them in the herculean job of re-orientation, reconstruction and re-engineering of the Nigerian psyche” (P. 380). In an interview with Onyerionwu, Irele puts it differently, he says, the “writer and critic thus contribute to national development, not in the immediate sense of improving the GDP but, in a more

fundamental way, of helping the process of self-understanding, of shaping the collective consciousness” (Onyerionwu, 2012; P.50). Summarily, literature plays a salient role in the recalibration of societal consciousness and for a concrete example, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* is highlighted as cyber-crime mirror and police, educating the masses in the most entertaining manner. It does not only condemn the Yahoo-Yahoo enterprise but it also pays attention to the kind of leadership that is needed in Nigeria’s current dispensation (Akpan, 2023).

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