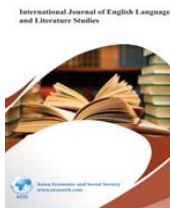




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EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC AS A MEANS OF CHARACTERISATION: AN EXAMPLE OF PAPA (EUGENE) IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

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ABSTRACT

This article began with an introduction which gave the theoretical background by high- lighting epideictic as an aspect of rhetoric that was suitable for the analysis of the character of Papa in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus. For a better understanding of the contribution of rhetoric to literary studies, the study explored the nexus between language, rhetoric, and literature. The study observed that these three disciplines were concerned with communication. Furthermore, the study carried out the analysis of the attractive qualities possessed by Papa that could be praise-worthy followed by the discussion of his unattractive qualities that could be blame-worthy. Based on the above discussion, the study found out that fanaticism and dogmatism were not good qualities of a Christian. Furthermore, the study discovered that use of tyranny and imposition of social restriction should be discouraged in family affairs. Finally, the novel is Adichie's angry denunciation of religious intolerance in Nigeria.

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Keywords: Literary communication, Character analysis, Fanaticism, Tyranny, Christianity. Adiche, *Purple hibiscus*.

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Contribution/ Originality

This study contributes to the existing literature as there is dearth of research in the area of rhetorical criticism. By using epideictic rhetoric as frame work, this study provides new insights into literary and linguistic criticism. Furthermore, it reveals new perspective in the analysis of characters in the novel.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are three types of rhetoric: forensic, epideictic, and deliberative rhetoric. Epideictic is rhetoric of praise or blame. It directs its attention to certain qualities possessed by an individual or group. Epideictic rhetoric provides the framework within which the qualities possessed by an individual can be studied. It is suitable for the analysis of characters in a fictional work. Rhetorical study of a literary work is an aspect of linguistic approach to literature which is in the domain of stylistics that has contributed enormously to the understanding of literary works.

With the application of epideictic rhetoric, the character of Papa (Eugene) in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* can be well understood. Papa's name is Eugene, but his daughter, Kambili, who is the narrator, calls him Papa.

Epideictic rhetoric, according to Akpan (1987) is concerned with happiness, virtue and vice, wrong-doing, pleasure, honour, dishonour, equity, laws, friendship, ideas, etc. This study draws inspiration from the above definition. Epideictic is quite suitable to the analysis and understanding of characters, especially, Papa in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.

Abrams (2005) sees epideictic rhetoric as "display rhetoric, used on appropriate, usually, ceremonial occasions to enlarge upon the praise-worthiness (or sometimes, the blame-worthiness) of a person or group of persons, ... The ode is a poetic form often used for epideictic purposes". In prose fiction, epideictic rhetoric contributes to the interpretation and understanding of characters. In this study on Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, it is a tool in our investigation leading to findings in the aspect of round characters in the novel. Papa exhibits both praise-worthiness and blame-worthiness in his character.

In his study of characters and characterization, Kayode-Iyasere (2000) reiterates that: "Basically, these two form part of the corpus termed, elements of prose fiction. They are so termed because they constitute part of the hob around which the study of prose writings revolves. They are intrinsically part of the composite whole in the study of literature". This opinion underscores the need for the study of characterization in *Purple Hibiscus*. Moreover, Kayode-Iyasere (2000) defines characterization as "the methods adopted in creating characters by writers of prose narratives".

Using the parameter of epideictic, Papa can be said to be loving, caring, devoted, humble, religious, generous, strict, overzealous, tyrannical, violent, high-handed and over bearing. Although Papa has attractive qualities, his negative attributes are the flaws that drag him to an early grave; an incident that can be described as domestic tragedy.

2. THE NEXUS BETWEEN LANGUAGE, RHETORIC, AND LITERATURE

To justify the choice of this topic and enhance the theoretical base of the paper, let us examine the nexus between language, rhetoric, and literature. To kick start the discussion on this, let us examine some definitions of language, rhetoric and literature.

Chukwu and Obuasi (2010) cite Edward Sapir who defines language as "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of voluntarily

produced symbol”. Hall (1968) sees language as “the situation whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral auditory arbitrary symbols”. The key point in the above definitions is that language is a medium of communication.

Rhetoric, according to Wales (1990) is the “art of speech ... the art of speaking well (*bene decendi*)”. Akpan (1987) sees rhetoric as the word that describes a certain kind of language use. Winterowd (1965) observes that rhetoric is “the art of effective communication”. The above definitions have revealed that rhetoric is an aspect of language; it is part of language. Many functions of language are achieved through rhetoric. Persuasive communication techniques whereby language is manipulated in such a way as to get others to agree with us (Unoh, 1987) are through rhetorical principles. Language manipulation is necessary for the success of a literary work. This occurs in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*. And it is the concern of literary communication.

Widdowson Rpt (2001) observes that literature is not only an exemplification of linguistic categories but also a piece of communication, a discourse of one kind or another. Rhetorical approach to literature treats it (literature) as a mode of communication from the writer to the reader. This explains the nexus between language, rhetoric, and literature. The three disciplines are concerned with communication.

Yankson (2008) defines literature as “language in use”. Akwanya (2005) sees literature as “the art of language”. Therefore, like language, literature is a medium of communication. Rhetorical study of literary texts seeks to investigate the use of language in the texts for proper interpretation of those texts. Our application of epideictic rhetoric to the study of Adichie’s characterization of Papa is for a proper character analysis. Papa is influential and dogmatic; a tragic character in a novel that gives the account of Christianity in Nigeria as well as the social, political, and economic situations in the contemporary Nigeria.

3. EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC AS A DISCOURSE OF PRAISE IN ADICHIE’S CHARACTERISATION OF PAPA

Papa displays certain qualities in the novel that we admire. These fall within the realm of epideictic rhetoric. He is generous, humble, loving and caring and a devoted Christian. Papa has demonstrated a lot of love, care, attention, sympathy, and so on towards his family, his brethren in the Catholic Church, and his employees. He has displayed the attributes of a good Christian who is God-fearing; a commander of the Salvation Army.

Papa is a good, responsible and a responsive father. He cares and provides for his family. The children do not lack anything and he makes sure they attend the best school in Enugu. Papa’s overzealous nature may drive him to the peak of irrationality and brutality but afterwards, he begins to show love and care expected of a good father. This occurs several times in the novel. One of such instances is after beating Kambili to the state of unconsciousness. Papa considers it as a sin for his daughter to be in possession of Papa-Nnukwu’s (their grandfather) painting. Papa sees his father (Papa-Nnukwu) as a heathen because he is not a Christian. While Kambili is lying in hospital bed later on, we see the display of love and care by Papa:

Papa's face was close to mine. It seemed so close that his nose almost brushed mine, and yet I could tell that his eyes were, soft, that he was speaking and crying at the same time. "My precious daughter. Nothing will happen to you. My precious daughter" ... "Your father has been by your bedside every night these past three days. He has not slept a wink." (Adichie, 2006).

Papa is not stone-hearted; his heart has the milk of human kindness. It is just that sometimes he is ruled by his passion for the Christian faith.

Papa is a devoted Christian who uses his wealth, body, and soul to propagate Christianity. He gives the highest donations for the various church projects. He plays a prominent role in every programme of St. Agnes. He single-handedly finances the church. He practises Catholicism without syncretism. His Christian beliefs have raped his emotions that sometimes he feels no sentiments outside his religion.

Papa is not miserly towards his children. He ensures that they get the best. He makes available all that they need so that they come on top of their classes in school. He demonstrates enthusiasm towards their studies. Kambili, the narrator informs us that:

The school break was short, only two weeks, and the Saturday before school resumed, Mama took Jaja and me to the market to get new sandals and bags. We didn't need them; our bags and brown leather sandals were still new, only a term old. But it was the only ritual that was ours alone, going to the market before the start of each new term, rolling the car window down as Kevin drove us there without having to ask permission from Papa (Adichie, 2006).

This is an instance of how Papa shows love and care to his family. He is committed to the education of his children. Furthermore, he has always wanted his children close to him. Separation from them for few days is like eternity and this makes him shed tears.

Papa's Philanthropy has wiped tears from the eyes of many people. He uses his money for the well-being of the church and the less privileged. He is concerned with the welfare of his staff and their family. At home, in Abba, his presence at every Christmas symbolizes feast and plenty. Every year, we see wives of the Umunna take the leftovers of the fat pieces of meat, the rice and beans, the bottles of soft drink and maltina and beer home with them. He is always prepared to feed the whole village at Christmas. He is given the title, *Omelora*, meaning, "The one who does for the community". And when he is at home, everybody will eat and drink to their satisfaction.

Hawkers and beggars benefit from Papa's generosity. He pays the school fees of many less privileged children. He wills half of his asset to St. Agnes and Missions. He has anonymously donated to the children's hospitals and motherless babies' homes and disabled veterans from the civil war.

When the editor of his *Standard* newspaper, Ade Coker dies, he does not abandon his family but ensures their well-being financially and morally. He sends the late editor's daughter abroad for treatment. Papa's gateman in his home, Abba, is full of praises for him:

The gate man waved with both hands over his head as we drove off. His name was Haruna, he had told Jaja and me a few days before, and in his Hausa accented English that reversed P and F, he told us that our Pather was the best Big Man he had ever seen, the best emfloyer he had ever had. Did we know our Pather faid his children's school Pees"? Did we know our Pather had helpfed his wipe get the messenger Job at the Local Government Oppice? We were lucky to have such a Pather. (Adichie, 2006).

Papa has a heart of gold, which everybody admires. He is a good employer who treats his workers very well. Their welfare is his priority. When his editor, Ade Coker, is assassinated, he sponsors his funeral and sets up a trust for Yewande Coker (the wife) and the children. He also goes ahead to buy a new house for them. As for the rest of the staff of the *Standard*, he pays them huge bonuses and asks them to go on a long leave. This is a good gesture.

As a good Christian, Papa's reaction to every compliment on his good deed is marked with humility:

Father Benedict talked about things everybody already knew, about Papa making the biggest donations to Peter's Pence and St. Vincent de Paul. Or about Papa paying for the cartons of communion wine, for the new ovens at the convent ... And I would sit with my knees pressed together, next to Jaja, trying hard to keep my face blank, to keep the pride from showing, because Papa said modesty was very important. Papa himself would have a blank face when I looked at him, the kind of expression he had in the photo when they did the big story on him after Amnesty World gave him a human rights award. It was the only time he allowed himself to be featured in the paper. His editor, Ade Coker, had insisted on it, saying papa deserved it, saying Papa was too modest.(Adichie, 2006).

All these show us his attractive qualities. He is Godly. ; when Yawande Coker Kneels in greetings, showing appreciation over what Papa has done for her and her family, his response is, "It is God. It is all from God". (Adichie, 2006).

These are some of the impressive qualities which Papa possesses as exhibited to the admiration of readers. These qualities that Adichie had endowed him with help establish a rapport with the readers that they sympathize with him when he becomes a victim of his own tyranny.

4. EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC AS A DISCOURSE OF BLAME IN ADICHIE'S CHARACTERIZATION OF PAPA IN *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

Papa is fanatical and he exhibits all the insensitive and negative characteristics of an overzealous Christian. He is tyrannical, violent; mean to his father, conservative, dogmatic, domineering; a disciplinarian who handles his children with iron-hand. His major flaws in the novel are fanaticism and overzealousness.

Papa believes that any way of life that is outside the injunction and practice of the Catholic Church is sinful and evil, leading to hell fire. He therefore becomes dogmatic, insensitive and very strict in his observance of Christian religion. He has imposed regimented life style on his children. Socially, they are restricted and psychologically, they are imprisoned.

Papa's fanaticism and overzealousness have no human face. A non-Christian to him is a heathen who is condemned to roast in hell fire. He has no regard for his father because the father is not a Christian; he has become mean towards him. To him, his father is Godless because he worships gods of wood and stone. He bars his children from eating and drinking in their grandfather's house and they are not allowed to stay with him for more than fifteen (15) minutes. Papa himself does not visit his father. Despite his wealth, the father lives in abject poverty; he is as poor as church rat, looking weak and sickly. The condition he gives his father to make him care and provide for him is to convert to Christianity and throw away the *chi*. But the old man will not

exchange his *chi* for a good house, car with a driver and other luxuries of life. Papa's religious belief has alienated him for his father and he treats him (the father) like an enemy. Listen to him:

"I don't like to send you to the home of a heathen, but God will protect you," As Kevin drove us out of the compound later that morning, I turned to allow my eyes to stroke, once again, the gleaming white walls and pillars of our house, the perfect silver-coloured water arch the Fountain made. Papa-Nnukwu had never set foot in it, because when Papa had decreed that heathens were not allowed in his compound, he had not made an exception for his father. (Adichie, 2006).

This passage reveals the magnitude of Papa's overzealousness. Furthermore, the word "decree" in the passage throws light on Papa's tyrannical attribute. The passage explains the level of Papa's fanaticism. He rejects his father because of Christianity. This is unnatural and abnormal.

Papa grudgingly sends his driver, Kevin to his father, Papa-Nnukwu with Paltry sum of money. The money he gives his father is smaller than what he gives Kevin as Christmas bonus. He does not care a hoot about his father's health and the old man's left eye is now going blind. Papa-Nnukwu is like the man in the proverb who lives on the river bank but washes his face with his spittle.

When Auntie Ifeoma, Papa-Nnukwu's daughter and Papa's younger sister brings the old man to Nsukka for treatment due to an illness, as at the time Kambili and Jaja are there on a visit, Papa in anger hurries to Nsukka to bring his children back to Enugu so that they do not share the same roof with Papa-Nnukwu whom he calls a heathen. This is an opinion that even Father Amadi does not share. This reveals Papa's overzealous attitude.

Papa is so dogmatic and fanatical that on their return home from Nsukka, he pours hot, scalding water on his children's feet. This is an act of terrorism, but he considers it as an act of purification. For sleeping in the same house with Papa-Nnukwu, they have walked into a sin and Papa is furious about it.

Papa is insensitive and with the exception of his religion, he seems to be bereft of emotions and sentiments. The church is his top priority and the family and other emotions play the second fiddle. Christianity is his number one consideration; his children's emotions are not important. So, Papa always inflicts injuries on members of his family. The following passage explains the plight of his son, Jaja:

When he was ten, he had missed two questions on his catechism test and was not named the best in his First Holy Communion class. Papa took him upstairs and locked the door. Jaja, in tears, came out supporting his left hand with his right, and Papa drove him to St. Agnes hospital. Papa was crying, too, as he carried Jaja in his arms like a baby all the way to the car. (Adichie, 2006).

This is corporal punishment that Jaja does not deserve. It is child abuse. The punishment enunciated in the above passage has left Jaja with a gnarled finger, deformed like a dried fish. Papa's religious beliefs have made him irrational and tyrannical. His religious practice has imprisoned his family psychologically. They all live in fear and under suppression. They speak in whispers and Kambili is almost turned half-dumb. Amaka refers to her as *atulu* (sheep) because she is too shy to speak. They live like servants in paradise.

Papa catches Kambili in the presence of Mama and Jaja eating ten minutes before Mass so that she can swallow panadol tablets to relieve her of menstrual pains. To do this, according to Papa is walking into a sin and so he punishes by beating them,

..... with a sedate leather covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, which was covered by the puffy sequined sleeve of her church blouse. I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back. (Adichie, 2006).

For his wife (Mama) and his son, Jaja, to watch Kambili eating ten minutes before Mass to take drugs means that they are all on errands for the devil. This is insensitive and inconsiderate. He blurts out that the devil has built a tent in his house and so, the three of them are punished. Papa is extra ordinary in his religious beliefs that even his prayers at meals last for twenty minutes and sometimes more than.

The children enjoy living with Auntie Ifeoma and her family in Nsukka even though her house lacks the luxury and comfort that Papa's house in Enugu provides. Life in Enugu with Papa is one of social restriction.

Colonial mentality negatively manifests in Papa. He imposes regimented life style on his children. They have schedule which dictates whatever they do. They do not violate it. This is a practice that Auntie Ifeoma finds ridiculous, incredible, and absurd. Her reaction to it is:

Auntie Ifeoma stared at the paper in Jaja's hand. Then she started to laugh so hard that she staggered, her tall body bending like a whistling pine tree on a windy day. "Eugene gave you a schedule to follow when you're here? *Nekwanu anya*, what does that mean?" ... "I will keep them for you until you leave" ... if you do not tell Eugene, eh, then how will he know that you did not follow the schedule, gbo? (Adichie, 2006).

Papa has been brought up by priests and sisters at the mission and so, he apes the ways of life of the white man. This is more than usual as he is alienated from his people. He puts on air when speaking English with white missionaries and he does not approve of his children speaking Igbo in public.

Papa's dogmatism and tyranny drag him to his grave. He dies like a rat on his desk in his factory office as a result of the poison put in his tea by Mama, his wife. He wants to be more Catholic than the Pope, so, he becomes so fanatical in a way that his family detests. His attitude results in the domestic tragedy witnessed in the novel. Papa's Christian beliefs cloud his sense of reasoning. His father, Papa-Nnukwu whom he condemns appears happier in death than him because he (Papa-Nnukwu) is smiling in death. Papa's observance of Christian religion seems to be misplaced.

5. CONCLUSION

Using the features of epideictic, Adichie has created Papa as a character who possesses both attractive and unattractive qualities. He is nice, generous, but fanatical and tyrannical. Thus, the unattractive qualities in his life are responsible for his doom. Epideictic rhetoric is based on the assumption that the analyst or rhetor knows the qualities that are praiseworthy or blame-worthy. The application of epideictic rhetoric to Adichie's characterization of Papa has revealed that:

1. The author disapproves of Papa's attitude.

2. The death of Papa is an indication of the author's condemnation of religious intolerance in Nigeria.
3. The novel reveals Adichie's condemnation of religious fanaticism and social restriction as practised by Papa.
4. Christianity is not the only religion that brings salvation to man. It is not the only ticket to paradise.
5. Papa's tragedy is a lesson to tyrannical and overzealous Christian parents.
6. Papa's attractive and unattractive qualities make him a complex and a round character in the novel.

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