
**TRAUMA FROM CONTRADICTORY WORLDS: ENGAGING LANGUAGE
AND EXPERIENCE IN FEMI OJO-ADE'S HOME SWEET SWEET HOME**

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Abstract

Literature is known for its recreation of human experiences, and language is its major tool. The experiences come in different manners: joyful, shocking, purgative, self-expiating, and so on. The hero is usually the focal person in the experiences. He or she is created to exist in a world that has direct impact on him or her through interaction. The interaction carries all the vagaries of life, and trauma which arises from turbulence, fear, delusion, surprise etc. is one of the possible experiences. As a concept, though developed in psychology but which has permeated other disciplines and discourses, trauma in literature interrogates the space for inner memories of characters to introspect and retrospect, foreshadow and flashback, ruminate in awful regrets, suffer pain and agony etc. This paper, therefore, examines Femi Ojo-Ade's creation of two worlds and the trajectory trauma in the hero of the novel, Home Sweet Sweet Home. The paper adopts the text linguistic theory, which draws a connection between the message of the text and its language; examining how texts are created and understood. The conclusion of the paper is that part of the beauty of the novel, Home Sweet Sweet Home, lies in the ability of the author to stylistically use language to create two worlds, with the incidental trauma and contradictions that engulf the hero.

Keywords: Trauma, Contradiction, Language, Experience

1. Introduction

Language is one aspect of literary discourse which assumes a controversial but inalienable role, especially in core literary criticism. This is because some critics who believe in arts for arts sake do not consider language a prominent element of literature, arguing that the art in literature can do without considering the language element. However, in other fields such as linguistics (essentially adopting approaches such as linguistic stylistics, text linguistics, discourse analysis), it is obvious that literature as art relies on the writer's creative manipulation of language. Remove language skill,

literature ceases to exist. Chukwu and Okeke (2013, pp. 43-44) in their study of the complimentary relationship between literature and language observed that “separation of language from literature could be likened to an attempt to separate form from content, or container from its content. Language is the form or the container, while literary message and creativity are the contents. Therefore, rather than seeing one as separate from the other, they should be studied in complementary relationship”. For Roger Fowler, “What linguistic consideration does is to “provide ways of unfolding and discussing precise textual effects, and may be seen as a means of assuring a sound factual basis for many sorts of critical judgment” (1971, p. 28).

Creativity in literature comes in different forms such as the creation of human beings in the form of fictional characters; human beings who behave and carry themselves in a manner that brings illusion of reality. Again, a literary writer creates situations that are not far from the real world of real human existence. Furthermore, there is the artistic weave of incidents in a manner that replicates natural order of existence. These and other skills compel a reader to forget that he/she is reading a mere text. He/she is emotionally lured into the fictive world not far from the real world. All of these owe so much to language use. There is no denying the fact that the writer does not have any other tool of expression, hence h/she can be appreciated from the standpoint of h/her use of language. A good literary writer can thus be called a skillful user of language because the success in creating a believable world depends on skillful use of language.

Writers do not make use of language in the same manner. Every writer is unique, and this accounts for one way of discussing style, as a writer’s unique choice and linguistic appropriation in the expression of intended message. Style is never accidental. It is the manifestation of the synergy between thought and expression, message and language. It gives credence to the argument that content (message or theme) exists in literature through form (language).

Against the above background, this paper examines trauma, first as an aspect of the chief character’s experiences in the novel under study, and secondly as an experience which the writer skillfully portrays through the creation of two worlds using language. The chief character is caught between two worlds: expectation and reality, sanity and insanity, frustrated indigene and oppressed foreigner. The paper examines how these contradictions are created not only as situations but as an aspect of the language choice of the novelist.

2. Conceptual Review

Trauma: In simple terms, trauma is a psycho-emotional condition of distress and pain. Its major domain of discussion is clinical psychology. However, interdisciplinary discussions which hold current in modern-day scholarship have adapted the concept to different fields. In literary discourse, it is an offshoot of psychoanalytical approach.

Taking it to the language analysis of literary works, it is possible to explain the ways that narratives implicate trauma consciousness by considering the speeches of characters as representations of their state of mind. This is because emotional *dis*-balance can easily manifest linguistically through deviation from the subject of a discourse. It can also come in the form of incoherent link of issues and events, illogical leap into the past and future, etcetera. While a stable mind produces free flowing and coherent discourse, a traumatized mind is prone to incoherence as it struggles to bring itself together, recover from shock and come to terms with realities. Again, an obvious expression of shock and surprise, even when coherently done, could also implicate trauma, especially, when the context places the speaker in circumstantial actions of rumination in awful regrets, or suffering from pain and agony.

The focus of this paper is on trauma as can be implicated in linguistic choices. The paper aims at examining how the language of the selected novel creates two worlds around the protagonist, as well as the consequential trauma that characterize the experiences of this protagonist.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this paper is the text linguistic theory. Different theoretical orientations in linguistics have explained the concept of text in different but related manners. Halliday and Hasan (1976, p.1) explained it as “any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole”. They further explained that a text is determined not necessarily in terms of structure, but “a text is best regarded as a SEMANTIC unit: a unit not of form but of meaning” (p.2). According to Adejare (1992, p.6), “The text is a unit of language that has been used in a specific context by a text producer with the purpose of communicating a message through the use of linguistic signs existing within the language’s semiotic universe”.

The major notion of text linguistic theory is that every text, written or spoken is a communication system. Werlich cited in Carstens, has argued in support of text linguistic theory that sentence grammars do not tell the learner the whole story about communication by means of language (<http://www.pala.ac.uk>). Differentiating between text grammar and text linguistics, Carstens stated that text linguistics “is devoted to describing how texts are created and understood”. Referring to intentionality as one of the categories of attention in text linguistics, Carstens further stated that in any text there is a producer who has the intention to produce a sound piece of information to a receptor. The receptor, on his or her part, needs to be willing to accept the proffered text as a communicative text. In a text such as in the novel under study, the writer recognizes that there is a reader for whatever he/she is writing. Again, there is intention or motivation behind what s/he is writing. Therefore, the text contains the message of the writer to the reader, and this has been communicated through language.

Accordingly in text linguistic analysis, the interest of the analyst should be to examine how the writer has communicated his or her message, the manner of linguistic choices made within the context of the text, bearing in mind that different linguistic choices

from which selection can be made are open to the language user. It is the interest of this paper to examine which messages of trauma exist in the novel under study; what language techniques have been adopted by the author, and how they have been manipulated to communicate this message.

4. Text Analysis

Home Sweet Sweet Home (1987) is a fictional prose written by Femi Ojo-Ade, which captures the post-independence Nigerian socio-political and economic landscape. Ade is the protagonist who is pressured by his father to return from the United States of America, where he had lived for twelve years. He gets home to behold disappointments of different sorts. At the airport in America, he receives courteous attention from the airport staff but cannot understand why the attendants are wondering why he is traveling with a one-way ticket. He cannot understand the crime in someone leaving a foreign land for his home. Contrarily, at the airport in his home, he is subjected to very unfriendly and dehumanizing interrogation, and later defrauded of huge sum of money. On getting home, he finds out that both parents are dead in his absence; the relations' heightened hope for a triumphant return of a son from overseas is dashed as he fails to bring the expected luxuries from America. He reunites with his girl friend, Rose, but is weighed down by indecision to formalize any marriage. The people's life style that has been stripped of love and passion continues to bring shock on daily basis. Disillusioned, Ade wakes up one morning to hear, on his radio, the news of *coup de tat*. As if waiting for the opportunity, he runs back to the United States of America.

From the brief synopsis, we can derive the two worlds that form the fulcrum of our discourse. First, we have United States of America versus Ade's home, presumably fictive Nigeria. Secondly, we have Ade's personal simple world that turns out to be utopian in conflict with the cosmetic and deceptive world that is the reality. There is also a world of love, care and passion versus a world that lacks the milk of human love and passion. At the centre of all these is Ade, and the consequence is a traumatized soul and disillusioned being who could not identify himself with any of the worlds. None of the worlds could accommodate him. He is a stranger in America where he suffers psychological humiliation but enjoys organized and ordered society short of petty intimidation and extortion. He is also a stranger at home where he faces disappointment from shattered expectations, where he is confronted with a battered society full of dirt, decay, several lunatic cases, frustration and disappointment.

The focus of this paper is to evaluate how all these have been ensconced in the language choice of the author. Two major techniques are examined here: oxymoron and irony. These are very common figures of expression, however, that evoke very significant linguistic considerations.

Oxymoron:Leech (1969, p.140) classified oxymoron and paradox as figures of absurdity which entail “irreconcilable elements of meaning or reference”. The author further states that in the simultaneous use of supposed antonyms which is what oxymoron does, “...it is the mysterious merging of contrary emotions that is imaginatively realized in such expressions rather than their coexistence” (p. 142). The contrary emotions emanate from a violation of a category of language rule; that is by the use of words that lack semantic collocation, with the consequence of stretching the reader’s experience beyond commonsense view about life.

We can apply the above knowledge in the reading of fictional narratives, where the reader is meant to see *reality* through the experiences of the characters. Fictional prose writers can communicate their literary messages through several means such as the overt story line, symbolism, iconic representation of images, characterization, manipulation of linguistic techniques, and many others. Narrowing this to decoding messages about the psychology and mind state of a character, Leech and Short (1981, p. 337)for instance, advise that “we cannot see the minds of other people, but if the motivation for the actions and attitudes of characters is to be made clear to the reader, the representation of their thoughts, like of soliloquy on stage, is a necessary license”. The authors further advise that such “...are not just to report what the character thinks, but also to render the character’s immediate experience or consciousness of those thoughts” (p. 337).

What these imply is that a character’s speech, action or attitude is a medium through which messages can be derived about his (the character’s) view about reality. And in the context of the novel under study, where remarkably, most of the chief character’s expressions are presented in oxymoron; messages that suggest contradictory worlds are perceived as running in the consciousness and thought of the character; implicating a disillusioned mind so confused and traumatized. Let us consider some excerpts from the novel.

Chapter One adopts the stream of consciousness technique to present Ade’s thoughts while at the Kennedy Airport waiting to board his flight to Nigeria. It was a rumination of his experiences that form his perception about America. Consider the contradictions in the highlighted lexical items in the excerpts below:

Twelve years in America, the Great Society. Twelve years of joyful sorrow, material happiness and psychological sadness. Twelve years of being an accepted outsider ... (p. 2)

*Everything was done precisely, with no arguments. You wondered, - indeed you always did, throughout your sojourn in the Great Society, - how **order** was ever maintained in that **chaos**.*(p.2)

*It was still almost an hour before boarding time. Enough time to reflect on the past twelve years in the **civilized jungle**?* (p.3)

What we experience in the excerpts are not careless lexical miscollocations arising from a disordered thought, but a true and careful representation of the consciousness and thoughts of the character. The irreconcilable elements of meaning (using Leech's choice) present contradictory worlds as they exist in the experiences of this character:

Joyful	sorrow
Material happiness	psychological sadness
Accepted	outsider
Civilized	jungle

To understand the imports of the lexical choices here, we refer to the title of the novel *Home Sweet Sweet Home*. This title implicates emotional nostalgia, a strong yearning and desire for not just home but a sweet home; not just a sweet home but a sweet sweet home. The repetition of the pre-qualifying adjective (sweet) is a stylistic device for emphasis.

There are two locales in the mindset of the character: where he is (America) and where he yearns to be (sweet sweet home). Where he is presents two worlds: joy and sorrow, happiness and sadness, acceptance and rejection. This is a contradictory and absurd world generated through lexical miscollocation and irreconcilable images. No doubt, this is the story of majority of Africans who have lived in the Western countries: material and economic fulfillment but psychological aridity.

On reaching home, Ade's anxiety for a warm reception, and his people's expectation of wonderful gifts from America, are presented in contradictory and deflated tone. The context is presented thus:

*The children's eyes fixed him warmly and curiously a brand-new toy always seen on television but never before touched jumping out of those bags before him. **The adults' eyes expressed hope of a miracle. Respite from an existence of suffering and sadness. Redemption from a life-time condemned to **living death**.*** (p.25)

Dead silence. Looks exchanged on all sides. Embarrassment. Eyes filled with spite and disgust. Loss of respect and love for a **hopeless saviour**. (p. 27)

The interest of this discourse is on the highlighted descriptions: **living death** for his people, and **hopeless saviour** for Ade. Even without any detailed description, such word choices are capable of creating the appropriate imagery for the context. Ade and his people do not belong to the same world. However, each of their worlds contains implicit contradictory impressions. The people are living and at the same time dead; Ade is a saviour and at the same time hopeless. This is a reflection of contradiction between

expectation or wish and reality. The people wished for a saviour but they have hopelessness as reality; wished for life but dead in reality.

Irony: We take H.W. Fowler's definition in Leech's (1968, p.171) as the background for our discussion in this section. According to Fowler, irony is "a mode of expression which postulates a double audience, one of which is 'in the know' and aware of the speaker's intention, whilst the other is naïve enough to take the utterance at its face value". Much as Leech sees this definition as fitting for the type called dramatic irony, we recognize the contradiction generated in irony from its incompatibility with the context. Irony creates two situations: the overt and the underlying which must contradict the overt. As Leech (1968, p. 172) puts it, "when someone takes an ironical remark at face value, we are justified in saying that he has 'failed to appropriate the irony' of it". As such, irony creates two worlds: those that take the face value, and those that take the underlying value which is where the real message belongs. Those that take the face value live in deception.

Narrowed to our current discourse, we find a situation where the novelist uses ironical contradictions to create two worlds: the deceptive which stands overtly witnessed, and the underlying which hides but expresses the message of the expressions. With this, the novelist satirizes the ugly situations which inconvenience the psychology and consciousness of Ade, his protagonist. This technique of semantic contradiction dominates in the description of Ade's experiences at home. Consider Ade's experience at the Progress Airport at home.

*Ade didn't listen. He did not hear. He walked into the **imposing white mansion** with the other passengers. The inside belied the external beauty. **Flies were fighting for breathing space with human leeches. Feet were converging joyously on a floor decorated with dirt....A circle of customs officials busy doing nothing.... In that chaos and busy idleness there was no hope... (p.9)***

Unfortunately, Ade's home which he had yearned for poses an entirely disheartening situation: **chaos and busy idleness, there was no hope.**

With this scene, two contradictory worlds are created, both internationally and internally. Internationally, this description contradicts Ade's American experience where "Everything was **done precisely**, with no arguments. You wondered, - indeed you always did, throughout your sojourn in the Great Society, - how **order** was ever maintained in that **chaos**" (p. 2).

AMERICA

Precision
No arguments
Great society
Order in chaos

HOME

busy doing nothing
no hope
Flies, human leeches
chaos and busy idleness

This casual schema shows the two worlds captured in contextual antonyms. Weighing the possible consequences of such comparison within the psychology of the victim, we envisage frustration, shock and disillusionment.

Internally, the name of the airport (Progress), and the description of the building (imposing white mansion) contradict the reality inside it. Progress presupposes positive development hence antithetical with *chaos and busy idleness*, just as *white mansion* runs antithetical with *fighting for breath, flies, leeches, decorated dirt*. This incongruity between expectation and reality which the lexical choices generate is what pervades Ade's entire experiences at home, hence the source of his disillusionment and trauma. Remember he had yearned for a sweet home, but beholds a morally degenerated, economically mangled and socially decapitated society.

Still at the Progress airport, Ade receives another shock from the conduct of airport officials who are desperate to extort money from him. Ade's action poses a different world to these officers who expect him to do what is the normal practice in their own world. The word choice of their boss in his address to Ade proves that extortion and bribery is the normal order in their own world.

'Now, young man, let me first welcome you back home. We are here to serve you. However, you must realize that our work has to be done diligently and judiciously. We cannot afford to waste time, seeing that thousands of passengers arrive in our great nation daily. My assistant tells me you're refusing to co-operate with him in the execution of his patriotic duties. (p.12)

This address creates two worlds: the overt which expects the interpretation of the expressions from their face value; and which would see the officers as hard working, disciplined and patriotic; and Ade as someone obstructing their duty. There is also the underlying which relies on the background situation where the officers are asking for gratification before Ade is given a pass. This latter world will run in contradiction with the literal meanings of the highlighted words.

First, the officer started on a polite note: *welcome you back home*, thus creating the expectation of courtesy and disciplined attitude. Surprisingly, Ade experiences the opposite. Secondly, to the officer, what they are doing is *servicing* Ade, but to Ade, it is extortion. Again, to the officer, they are *diligent and judicious*, but to Ade, they are corrupt and roguish. To the officer, their nation is *great*, but to Ade, the nation is dead with corruption. To the officer, they are *patriotic*, but to Ade, they are destructive. To the officer, Ade is *refusing to cooperate*, but to Ade, he is asking for the right thing to be done. Note that Ade had earlier referred to America as a great society: *indeed you always did, throughout your sojourn in the Great Society*. This does not fit into irony because it does not contradict the context and real intention of the speaker. The intention is to show the speaker's sincere admiration of America as an organized society. In

contrast, the officer's use of great nation contradicts the context and intention hence should better be understood from a sarcastic point of view.

After suffering extortion from the airport officials, Ade's experiences on his way home also create two contradictory worlds. First is from the cab driver who differentiates between whom to abuse and who is to be respected.

*The driver was as polite as could be, **but only to Ade.*** (p. 14)

Ade also could not imagine the inhuman attitude of people towards an accident victim who ideally deserves assistance but is ignored and abandoned by the passerby.

*A voice told Ade it was inhuman to leave the helpless on the road, but **another voice, more sonorous, more convincing,** reminded him that he had to hurry to reach home.* (p. 17)

The post qualifiers used for the second voice (more sonorous, more convincing) helps the reader to logically conclude that Ade has started responding to the realities of his home country and every effort to reintegrate into the "new" world brings one form of devastation or the other. Few excerpts of Ade's experiences at home will assist us here. On one occasion that Ade steps out to visit a friend, he is shocked to behold this scene:

*He arrived at Reclamation Road well after 10 p.m. **That section of the town was another world altogether, the visitor was greeted by gentle breeze refreshing to the body and relaxing to the soul.*** (p.48)

Ironically, in the same city, there is evidence of poverty and squalor. Drawing a more poignant contrast using two personae representatives (Olu and Ayoka), the novelist writes:

May be those like him (referring to Olu) on Reclamation Road cannot, but how about people in the slums and mad ones like Ayoka. (p.55)

There are two worlds created in the excerpts: the *Reclamation Road* symbolizing affluence and good life on the one hand, and *slums and mad ones* symbolizing abject poverty and frustration. Ironically, these two are in the same city.

One other instance of ironical contradiction that sets Ade dumbfounded is presented thus:

Women with seven-month pregnancies married to absentee husbands, seen in motel-rooms with rich businessmen without business. To those who have, more shall be given. A woman gives her body to the houseboy, while the husband is away at an international conference- in the company of his mistress who is married to an important civil servant. (p. 64)

Thus, Ade is not only confronted with two contradictory psychological worlds, but also contradictory physical worlds that create disgusting ironies of life. It is this form of

experience that triggers disappointment and disillusionment in Ade, hence he is pressured to conclude, after reading some inscriptions written on vehicles, that:

My people are godly people (ironically) fond of ungodly acts, like playing at gods and being dictators and beasts. (p. 77, my insertion)

The tone of this statement is that of absolute disparagement arising from a concluded and convinced observation. This submission is self-castrating, undisguised in its condemnation of Ade's people. Thus Ade's decision to jump back to America on the announcement of a *bloodless change of the guard* in the country stems from a traumatized psychology which can no longer endure the frustration and shock inherent and entrenched in the entire architecture of his home society . This is captured in the epilogue thus:

Ade came back home, stayed awhile and left. Others came, stayed a long time, definitely, but only in body. Their souls refused to be reduced to the level of reptiles creeping in dirt, poisoning everything in sight. (p. 122)

This authorial voice sums up the thrust of our discourse: an ordered society conflicting with a disordered society; a willing body conflicting with a traumatized soul; two worlds existing in one. Externally, there are two worlds, Ade's world and that of the others. Internally, there are also two worlds, the physical which the second group reluctantly accepted, and the psychological which *the soul refused to be reduced to*.

5. Conclusion

The paper has examined how the novelist manipulated the resources of language to communicate the literary message of two worlds existing in one, and the consequent trauma such condition is capable of inflicting on an individual. The examination was done from the ambience of oxymoron and irony as techniques that capture contradictions and absurdities between expectation and reality. Through this the paper proposes that understanding the linguistic structuring of a narrative is an efficient way of uncoiling the message of a narrative.

From our analysis so far, it could be deduced that American environment provided Ade with a temporary escape from reality. He enjoyed false and illusionary identity with the temporary flight into comfort in a strange land that yet saw him as an outsider. On the other hand, his home provided him the stark reality of his identity, unfortunately one that is characterized by frustration and hopelessness.

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