

African novel and the bildungsroman tradition: Habila's literary vision in *Waiting for an Angel*

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Abstract

*The novel as a literary genre is one of the most popular art forms that Africans gladly inherited from their colonial masters. Since its inception on the African horizon, the novel has been experimented with in its variegated forms and styles by African novelists, who have always modelled their works after their European counterparts. Thus, African novelists have adapted the Bildungsroman tradition of the English novel, but not without some “bending” to suit their social realities. One thing that is not clearly defined, however, is the poetic vision – the novelists’ intention – for writing those literary adaptations. This work investigates Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* to ascertain its novelistic form. It also interrogates the author’s poetic vision – what he intends to achieve by that structural experimentation. Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory is adopted. The study reveals that the novel, *Waiting for an Angel* is an autobiographical novel of developmental trajectory of a character, envisioned to pull down all oppressive tendencies that hinder development, freedom, aspirations and the general well-being of the protagonist, and indeed, ordinary members of the society. Therefore, it is revolutionary since it demands, ideologically, destruction of all forms of subsisting military*

autocracy against the citizens, and the dawn of a new social, economic, and political order in Nigeria.

Keywords: *bildungsroman, psychoanalysis, political bildungsroman, unconscious, id, and ego*

Introduction

Bildungsroman is a literary tradition of the novel subgenre. Ever since its popularisation by the German critic, Karl Morgerstern, in 1803, the form started to get traction that it became the ideal for popular novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century English novelists. Its simplest definition is that it is “a type of biographical/autobiographical fiction that renders the process of growth and formation of a character in his/her both biological and intellectual development from childhood till early maturity” (Golban & Benli 2015:2).

The rise and concern of the novel on the African scene are different from its English birthing circumstances. Considering the content, it is realistic - having a full and authentic report of human experiences. Reason for the difference resides in the province of human experiences it is bound to portray. The troika, Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike (1980:8) make this abundantly clear in their pronouncement thus:

The African novel's primary constituency is different from that of the European or other regional novels...The colonial situation imposes a different set of concerns and constraints upon the African novel than upon novels of the imperialist nations. The African novel therefore has every cause to be concerned with issues antithetical to

those which the imperialist countries would prefer to see treated in their literatures.

Charles Nnolim in *Issues in African literature* (2009:82) and Ernest Emenyonu in *Studies on the Nigerian Novel* (1991:vii) re-echo and expand the Troika's assertion in *Toward the decolonization of African literature*. While the English novel started with issues of concern to the middle class such as commerce and rise of new towns and cities, the case for Africa was one of response to colonialism/imperialism. It is about this that Nnolim has argued that

...the West African novel was born in response to colonial invasion and its abuses which threatened our collective security as a people, it has since then been sustained by reaction to our collective disenchantment with political independence; and it will further thrive by protests to abuses inherent in the inequities engendered by the kind of society we have chosen to operate (2009:82).

In his own treatise, then, Emenyonu (1991:vii) submits that the concern of early African novelists were the dual task of addressing their oppressors as well as fellow compatriots. Their mission is:

...to 'tell the African side of the story.' This essentially meant to correct the distortion of African reality imposed on the world by the forces of slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism...Equally, they sought to raise

the levels of consciousness of their fellow Africans about the harm done by the European colonizers to African cultural values and sense of self.

All the first generation of African novels is obviously concerned with one aspect of colonial evil or the other. This is the reason Chinyere Nwahunanya in “The Lachrymal Consciousness in the Literature of the Niger Delta: Its Implications for Conflict Resolution” describes African literature generally as one of protest “from the beginning” (2018:37). However, as time passed, African novelists gradually picked interest in the political activities and issues of governance in their states; and then to the larger social sphere, discussing other pertinent subject matters. It is on this account we talk about pre-independent or post-independent novels and vice versa, showing concern with the day to day management of the state. On relating this aspect of African literary history with the English, Nnolim (2009:81) posits that:

...no one need be surprised that the novel which is the one genre of literature manifestly originated and promoted by the bourgeois class would naturally navigate into the realm of politics which normally deals with the day-to-day management of public affairs.

From its rise in Africa, novelists embraced a modified bildungsroman tradition because they find it a suitable instrument to comment and stir action against colonialism/imperialism on their soil, and their enforcers. It has also been found to be useful in attacking and raising consciousness against bad leadership, oppression, suppression, exploitation, and other pertinent issues

bordering on politics, culture, economy, ecology, and religion. However, the novelists did modify the tool to suit their own artistic purpose; it has always been taken into the surgical theatre that will find it whole and healthy and actively functioning for the society. Thus, “African coming-of-age narrative does not emphasise self-realisation and the harmonious reconciliation between the protagonist and his society, as the prototypical Western *bildungsroman* does” (Okuyade 2011:124). It rather expresses a variety of factors that obstruct the protagonist’s self-realization. Martha Egbedi (2020:61) also avers that African *bildungsroman* is structurally different from the European format. Being emphatic with Nigerian *bildungsroman*, she remarks;

This is why the *Bildungsroman* in this context is not just a physical journey of integration or accommodation into the society, but, the dominant feature is change. The change is not just physical, but also psychological. The novels lack harmonious reconciliation of the protagonist with the society, but emphasises that economic and socio-political factors prevent the protagonist from achieving self – realisation. Hence, the protagonist needs a second journey.

It is agreeable that economic and socio-political factors prevent the protagonist from achieving self-realisation, but that does not translate to need for “a second journey”. Those obstructions when metaphorically interpreted stand for something else – an interloper, a suffocating agent that needs be addressed

or dismantled. Okuyade (2015:118) addressing the import of bildungsroman in African literature opines that:

The child-figure has artistically become a metaphor for calibrating the development of the continent as the development of the child is structurally constructed to metaphorically parallel that of the nation. The child-figure in African literature has become an eloquent marker that writers deploy in order to appraise pressing postcolonial concerns like violence, identity, politics and migration.

Jarad Fennel has argued that the narrator of bildungsroman exhibits a marked awareness of his or her own life experiences as raw materials for the story. But “in the hands of postcolonial and minority writers, this fictive act becomes of political and creative resistance” (2016:1). In other words, African bildungsroman, from its inception as colonial and post-independent novels have always been a tool in the hand of the novelist via which the novelist puts up one form of resistance or holistic change of one issue or more, bothering politics, identity, migration, et cetera.

One common phenomenon among African bildungsroman novelists is expression of dissatisfaction mainly by their protagonists and one or more other characters over some social, political, religious, or cultural experiences prominent in their society, as no one prescribes to a writer what to write and how to structure the writing. It is rather, “their response to exigent and urgent issues affecting society that is of paramount importance to them” (Ogaga Okuyade 2010:4). Arguing further about African bildungsroman, Martha Egbedi (2021:4) avers that “the social-

cultural background of each novel determines the growth process of the protagonists. This implies that the environment plays a vital role in the maturation process of the protagonist and quest for self-autonomy.” Arguing further, she states that African *Bildung* subject “could be a male or female, black, colonized...that must deal with identity crisis and similar issues in a hybrid setting” (2021:20). In other words, as a modernist novel, African novelists see themselves as agents, teachers and intellectuals, who unlike a power drunk soldier, takes his novel to be an active tool to perform a dual function of pointing out to their people what is wrong with them and their society, and what must be done urgently to change the narratives; to achieve the much needed self-identity.

Theoretical framework

This study adopts Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. Freud’s theory is one of the theories of literature considered suitable to study formation of characters in literary works, especially the Bildungsroman that is concerned with emotional, psychological, and in fact, holistic development of an individual as s/he matures from the state of childhood or adolescence to maturity. In connection to the medical discipline from which it originates, Cassandra Ifeoma Nebeife and Queen Nneoma Kanu (2017:93) explain that Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory is:

a specific type of treatment in which the analytic patient verbalises thoughts, including free associations, fantasies, and dreams, from which the analyst formulates the unconscious conflicts causing the patient’s symptoms and character problem,

and interprets them for the patient to create insight for resolution of the problems.

This implies that it is both analytical and therapeutic – the analysis (diagnosis) leads to the discovery of some illness which symptoms the character (patient) exhibit.

Lawrence Sargent Hall (1965:450) recognises Freudian psychoanalysis as “the only systematic account of the human mind which...deserves to stand beside the chaotic mass of psychological insights which literature has accumulated through the centuries.” Referring to its emergence, Freud himself insists that psychological study had been practiced in literary exercises since the Romantic nineteenth century. He admittedly announces that “the poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious...what I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied” (Hall 1965:450). The theory is thus a systematic means of interpreting the unconscious in literary arts. In Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (1956:81) psychoanalysis is described as

...the psychological study of the writer, as type and an individual, or the study of the creative process, or the study of the psychological types and laws present within works of literature, or finally, the effects of literature upon its readers.

This implies that psychoanalysis could study a literary work from four focal perspectives: that of the writer’s psychology as an individual; that of the writer’s psychological state at the time of writing a work or series of his/her works; that of psychological types of characters (id, ego, and superego); and then, that of effects of a creative art on the audience.

M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham (2012:320-321) attempt a simple and comprehensive explication of psychoanalysis. They explain that:

Freud proposes that literature and the other arts, like dreams and neurotic symptoms, consist of the imagined, or prohibited by the social standards of morality and propriety. The forbidden, mainly sexual (“libidinal”) wishes come into conflict with the “censor” (the internalised representative within each individual of a society’s standards of morality and propriety) and are repressed by the censor into the unconscious realm of the artist’s mind, but are permitted to achieve a fantasied satisfaction in distorted forms that serve to disguise their real motives and objects from the conscious mind.

Obviously, Freudianism is a theory of repression – a repression of the naturally biological instinct on the altar of social order and religion (often referred to as civilisation or culture). Repression, however, is one of the defence mechanisms; the Ego’s effort to keep anxious thoughts and impulses out of our awareness, hidden and buried. It is what Kendra Cherry refers to as “the unconscious blocking of unpleasant emotions, impulses, memories, and thoughts” from one’s conscious mind; and the purpose of this defence mechanism is to minimise feeling of guilt and anxiety. It is when it becomes excess that psychological distress sets in.

In their attempt to describe Freudian theory, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (1998:119) state that

...his discovery was that the human mind contains a dimension that is only partially accessible to consciousness and then only through indirect means such as dreams or neurotic symptoms. The “unconscious,” as he called it, is a repository of repressed desires, feelings, memories, and instinctual drives, many of which, according to Freud, have to do with sexuality and violence.

They further explain, according to Freud, why repression occurs to human and the consequence of that to the individual human behaviour. Their position is that repression is the mother of civility. By implication, the experienced civilisation burdens the civilised individual with strangeness or “uncanny” feeling that he unknowingly pushes to a part of his mind, the unconscious, whereby he loses control of it, and so it manifests at intervals especially during sleep. Rivkin and Ryan state that:

Repression is essential to civilisation, the conversion of animal instinct into civil behaviour, but such repression creates what might be called a second self, a stranger within, a place where all that cannot for one reason or another be expressed or realised in civil life takes up residence. This...explains why some people experience ...“uncanny” feelings of doubleness... it also explains why we compulsively repeat certain gestures, desires, experience, and self-induced situations that might be quite distressing but

also compellingly unavoidable. We cannot help but do so because they are brought about by forces and drives within ourselves over which we exercise very little conscious control because they arise from somewhere that is beyond our control – the unconscious (119-120).

A psychoanalytic study, therefore, seeks to validate Freud's view that man is sick in the mind, but unlike the biological sickness, he is often unaware of his sickness. These sicknesses are manifested in his unconscious utterances, actions and inactions. Similarly, a creative writer can cast on the pages of his work, his unconscious desires as a result of their compulsive nature. They are often expressed in their "ideal" character, the protagonist who, in this context, is the *Bildung* subject whose formation tale we interrogate.

Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* as a political bildungsroman

Helon Habila was born in 1967. The novel, *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), is a fictional autobiographical attempt to depict the nadir of humanity in the country prior to the new democratic dispensation. It is a depiction of the Nigerian state during the powerful Major General Ibrahim Babangida and Major General Sani Abacha juntas' reign of terror, characterized by victimisation, anguish, torture, assassination, molestation, total collapse of human right, and in fact, a season of anomie. It was a time of hopelessness and death. Human right activists and print and mass media experienced the height of gagging. Even creative writers – poets, playwrights, and novelists – were not spared. As

a result, some were assassinated by letter bomb such as Dele Giwa; hanging as done to Ken Saro-Wiwa; and others via the barrels of gun like Kudirat Abiola, the wife of M. K. O. Abiola. This forced many mouths closed while others fled the country to other countries of Europe. A few were either unable or unwilling to leave but rather decided to fight to finish in ensuring the birth of a new order in the country, most of whom were perpetually incarcerated on phantom allegations that they were political detainees until the time of Major General Abdulsalami Abubakar in 1998, who ordered the release of political detainees.

A close study of the novel indicates that Helon Habila does not merely deliver an account of the ordeals Nigerians traversed during the authoritarian and destructive regimes of the unpopular military juntas; he finds it to be an inspiring tool, a means of education, motivation, and reawakening for all and sundry to ensure a change of the political paradigm. He aesthetically achieves this through the story of growth and development of the leading and autobiographical character of Lomba, the Bildungsroman subject.

Waiting for an Angel as a bildungsroman

The basic understanding of Bildungsroman is that it is a novel of formation or education. The essence of formation or education of an individual is one of change from a less desirable or crude state to a more desirable or refined one. It follows, therefore, that the Bildungsroman subject (protagonist) must achieve the necessary transformation – from a state we find him earlier in life to a more refined one, essentially on intellectual and psychological basis. This transformation, certainly, is not a sudden and accidental one: it is a consequential and compulsive one. In other words, it

follows causality. Ogaga Okuyade (2011:143-144) quotes Jerome Buckle to have itemised the anatomy of Bildungsroman thus:

A child of some sensibility grows up in a country or provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to his ambitions, and quite impervious to new ideas he has gained.... His first schooling, even if not totally inadequate, may be frustrating in so far as it may suggest options not available to him in his present setting. He therefore, sometimes at quite an early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home, (and also the relative innocence), to make his way independently to the city (in English novels, usually London). There his real "education" begins, not only his preparation for a career but also ... and often more importantly ... his direct experience of urban life. The latter involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraises his values. By the time he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. His initiation

complete, he may visit his old home, to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success or the wisdom of his choice.

The following manifest structures confirm *Waiting for an Angel* as bildungsroman:

- a. **Childhood (Lomba as a youth):** The narrative does not create any insight about Lomba's family background. Therefore, we cannot say anything about his parents and his family members. His closest person is Bola his roommate back then in the university. In other words, the novel contains no information about his childhood. All we know about Lomba starts with his adolescence. Through flashback to the encounter between Lomba, the protagonist, and Alice his classmate and first girlfriend (a university undergraduate), we learn that he was twenty-two (22) years.

However, that does not invalidate the novel as Bildungsroman because; Lomba is still naïve and has to undergo mentorship/apprenticeship. In fact, some scholars do not stick to childhood age barrier but the primary issue of psychological transition. Thamarana (2015:22) for example argues that "the Bildungsroman intends to lead the reader to greater personal enrichment as the protagonist journeys from youth to psychological or emotional maturity."

- b. **Education and career:** What we know about Lomba's formal education begins with his truncated university education. His earlier dream is to become a published writer (Habla 2002:76). But consequent upon incessant closure of school, and the worst being Bola his friend and roommate who goes mad, he quits education searching for a means of

survival. He had told James Fiki, editor of *The Dial*, “When school began to look like prison, I had to get out” (Habila 2002:83). He tells James blankly, “I need a job” (Habila 2002:83), and with that, James who extols his writing ability offers him a job as art editor, though he would prefer he writes on politics. Lomba doubts his ability to write political story owing to, perhaps, his lack of interest in politics. But he is quickly advised, “You can’t escape it. In this country the very air we breathe is politics” (Habila 2002:83). This point marks the beginning of his mentorship under James and career as a journalist.

- c. **Mentorship/apprenticeship:** In reality, Lomba’s mentorship/apprenticeship started about his second year in the university under Dr Kareem, to whom he goes to discuss his poetry. It was that time that he met James, who published his article then in *The Dial*. When he goes back to James after two years he calls it quits with the university, it was time for proper journalistic mentoring. When James tasks him to write a story on politics as a proof of his ability to create interesting political stories and Lomba doubts his political interest and creativity, James informs him that everything in Nigeria is politics. James shows Lomba a sight of folks keeping vigil on an unending queue waiting for fuel even while “we are a major producer of oil” (Habila 2002:84). He enlightens him further:

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 unending transition programme. Write on that...The general disillusionment, the lethargy. You can be as imaginative as you want, but stick to the general facts (Habila 2002:84).

From that moment, James continues to mentor Lomba on the nitty-gritty of journalism and the media. Gradually, Lomba comes to the realisation of his role as a journalist and its importance. This coalesces with his maturity and awakening to the socio-political reality of his society.

- d. Travel/journey:** One important constituent of Bildungsroman is the journey motif. Journey is pivotal to the expected change, be that intellectual or mere social or political awareness; or realisation of a dream or its failure. In African Bildungsroman, it often serves as an opportunity for social, cultural, or political disillusionment.

In *Waiting for an Angel*, we realise that Lomba embarks on travel/journey thrice. The first time is when he left home, the North and moved to Lagos for university education. The second is when he leaves the university hostel and moves into Poverty (Morgan) Street where he lives while writing his novel and teaching "English and Literature an hour daily, minus Sundays, in a School Cert. preparatory class" (Habila 2002:82). But the most important is his journey with James to Slavery Museum in Badagry. It is this one that ultimately changes him and alters his initial refusal to cover the mass protest at the local government secretariat organized by Teacher Joshua, after which he is arrested and incarcerated.

- e. Love affairs:** Buckley had proposed that an ideal Bildungsroman subject has to undergo "two love affairs or

sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraises his values” (Ogaga 2011:143). This is also proposed by Golban and Benli (2015:2) stating that “he/she has to resist the trial by love and embark on a sentimental career.” Lomba the protagonist is enmeshed in two love ordeals and narrowly resists a third one. The first one is Alice a Direct Entry classmate of his with whom he had first sexual escapade on his second visit to her residence, until the violent demonstration of the students against IBB government that saw the university closed for a long time. The strength of their love could be deciphered in Lomba’s expression: “I love her so much. It makes me sick just to stand close to her” (Habila 2002:66). The love is the most devastating to Lomba. Lomba never returned to school again “because my friend went mad, because of so many things” (Habila 2002:73) and that marks the end of the love affair until both meet again at Mercy Hospital in Ikeja, three years later, when Alice is on National Youth Service. Unfortunately, things are no longer at ease; she has rededicated her love to Ngai because he is rich and can pay her bills.

We are not given much information about the second love affair with Sarimam. It has a far less psychological effect on Lomba, perhaps, that is the reason he fails to give us much information about that. We are certain Lomba loves Alice more than Sarimam – “my other great love – but no two loves, or pains, or loyalties can ever be the same” (Habila 2007:73). The third could have been Mahalia who meets him first in Emeka Davies’ house, but he does not give her the needed opportunity.

- f. Friendship:** In a strict sense, Lomba has one male friend – Bola – who doubles as his roommate. Incidentally, his sudden loss of sanity owing to the death of his parents by road accident adversely affects Lomba’s education as he appears to be an orphan. Another male associate of Lomba is Dr Kareem his lecturer. Lomba has two girlfriends: Alice his first love (the angel he has been waiting for) and Sarimam who suddenly left him for another man. Mahalia and Joshua are mere acquaintances and do not qualify as his friends. We learn of Lomba’s interior and exterior life, his aspirations and frustrations, his joys and pains via his social interactions with these associates of his.
- g. Psychological/spiritual crisis:** Bildungsroman is often seen as a novel of psychological and moral growth, hence Golban and Benli (2015:2) prescribes in the thematic structure that the protagonist “passes through moments of spiritual suffering and pain.” This view is strongly held by Noome (2004:129) who avers that the protagonist must pass through “a moral/ethical/spiritual crisis of a personal nature.”

Lomba’s crisis begins with the death of Bola’s parents who had hitherto, accommodated him as a member of the family and so has taken good care of him. The worst, however, is Bola’s insanity that leaves him broken, devastated, and demoralised, forcing him out of the university as he is left to fend for himself. Aside Bola’s death, Lomba is facing the psychological repression of his dream of becoming a published writer. The politically and economically charged atmosphere destabilises his creativity that for two years he cannot finish the writing. The most worrisome, however, is the dawning that “even if I finish it no one would publish it” because “here in this country our dreams are never realised;

something always contrives to turn it into a nightmare” (Habila 2002:126-127). This is the very reason he lost Alice his soul mate to Ngai. Two years after, while in prison, he still looks at her photo on the page of a newspaper with disbelief. He still dwells in the euphoria of his past life with Alice. In fact, the whole of Chapter 4 (Alice) is filled with the psychological/emotional discomfiture for Alice. At climax of the state of confusion, Lomba speaks in his mind (monologue) to Alice’s photo thus:

Hate you, Alice, how 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 neem tree... (Habila 2002:80).

Another cause of his psychological crisis is his incarceration. Lomba recalls that, as a matter of fact, that is the reason he decided to keep diary, “to say all the things I want to say, to myself... I write of my state in words of derision, aiming thereby to reduce the weight of these walls on my shoulders, to rediscover my nullified individuality” (Habila 2002:9). However, the novel is a supposed collection of Lomba’s diary as a political detainee.

- h. Maturity and epiphanies:** It is the avowal of Buckley, Noome, and Golban and Benli that the protagonist’s attainment of maturity is often followed by a moment of epiphanies. Maturity is the climax of the protagonist’s education or his apprenticeship at which the change process is

expectedly to be complete. At this point, he becomes aware of the socio-political construct of his society and comes to terms with the social norms; even though Egbedi (2021:12) argues that African Bildungsromane “challenge the values of their societies rather than personify them.” It is for this expected outcome of maturity that it is also referred to as “apprenticeship novel,” or “novel of awakening” because the once naïve/ignorant/simple child or adolescent changes and transforms to a full adult, experienced, possessing knowledge, and becomes fully aware of his social norms and expectation, whereby he chooses to integrate himself or to abjure and challenge the paradigm, with the intent to overthrow and propagate a new order.

Lomba, since his employment at *The Dial* has been working hard under close guidance of James who teaches him how to go about certain tasks. He teaches him also, the essence of the media and which is founded in its basic principle - “to refuse to be silenced, to encourage legitimate criticism where we find it” (Habila 2002:150). He attained a level of maturity after he and James visited the slave museum in Badagry. The stunning sites made him understand the urgency of upturning the table. He sees the reason he must muster courage and brace whatever violence the military government of the day could unleash on the protesters. He has realised that Nigerians are mere slaves; hence the onerous task of everyone that has a means to pursue their liberation. This is why after initial reluctance about covering the proposed protest by residents of Poverty Street, he resolves to be there. He leaves a message for Joshua through Kela, “Tell him I’ll be at the Secretariat to cover the demonstration. Tell him I’ve been to the slave museum at Badagry yesterday, and

that while there I realised why it is important to agitate against injustice, no matter the consequence” (Habila 2002:127).

Henceforth, Lomba changes from being a fearing and violence-phobic individual to a courageous one. With the clamp down on activists, media houses and media personalities in the form of arson, arrests, detentions, murder by bomb, hanging, shooting, etc and opportunity of meeting writers and publishers at Emeka Davies’ house, he comes to the full realisation of the political atmosphere of the country and the role of the writer and the media as the voice of the people, or better still, the last man standing in defence of the soul of the country. Succinctly put, Nigerian masses are like those slaves whose sculpture he had seen at Badagry: mouth locked denying them right to speak; hands and legs chained, making them unable to fight. In other words, they are incapacitated to revolt and regain freedom. He, therefore, resolves to identify with decent and courageous minds to demand a change of the general status quo for a liberal and progressive one, where dreams shall cease to be mere hallucinations but realistic.

Revolution in *Waiting for an angel*

In his essay, “Literature and Revolution,” Askari (2010:153-4) identifies two types of revolutionary literature: one group are those that show why the old system is “insufficient and unworkable” even though the authors might display a love for the old order. The second group are of writers “who know at a conscious level what new values need to replace the old ones” for they point, even if unintentionally, the required new values. It follows, therefore, that any literary work that portrays a

dissatisfaction with the polity or prevalent norms of a society; any literary work that consciously or inadvertently, by its tone, thematic thrust, metaphor or whatsoever literary device or technique, capable in any way to initiate change of the prevailing paradigm in any society, is unequivocally revolutionary.

An investigation of Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* as a revolutionary novel (Bildungsroman) is an enquiry into his ideological view; it is an enquiry beyond the *dulce* of the text to its *utile* of the Horatian maxim. That is to say that an investigation of the revolutionary function of a work is a search for its utilitarian function as contained in Horace's view that literature summarily performs dual function – *dulce et utile* – to delight and teach, that is, to be enjoyable and instructive. The revolutionary intent of a writer resides in the teaching function of literature, and that includes the philosophical ideas embedded in a work of literature. In other words, this enquiry has the sole intent of highlighting, not the “delightful” or the “pleasing” intent of *Waiting for an Angel*, but its “useful” or ideological indoctrination. In that case, it is a question of what Habila intends to achieve through the novel.

Revolution is pursued in the novel in a number of means. We shall take into account the fact that the novel was published in 2002. The military regime of Ibrahim Babangida and Sanni Abacha lasted from 1985 – 1998. In other words, it was published four years into Nigerian current democratic dispensation. We should therefore ask, “why writing on the destructive experience of Lomba and other citizens suffered during the military juntas while we have abandoned the ship for a new and promising one?”

The question above takes us back to Askari's assertion about revolutionary writers and their literature: “one group of writers shows variously why the old system and values are insufficient

and unworkable” (Askari 2010:153). The foremost intention of *Waiting for an Angel* is to inform and remind us primarily, the havoc military intervention in politics wrecked in Nigeria during the 80s and 90s. Having done that, therefore, he intends to say, via the portrayal of the state of the polity, that military officers are not good managers. In fact, the general atmosphere alone passes the message that military rule is “not workable” and remains anarchic, and therefore, we have no reason to look back to it as an option. Lomba, for instance, is detained for several years still on awaiting trial list, and “he is never going to be tried. He will be kept here forever, forgotten” (Habila 2002:30) simply for covering a peaceful protest. Another is the burning of media houses for reporting impunities the military commit in the country and its attendant economic loss they superintend.

Askari (2010:154) recognises another ideal of revolutionary writers. They are those who know the values that should replace the existing unsavoury norms, “At least they point...in to the direction of new values.” Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* is found fulfilling this task, though not literally. In several ways, the citizenry are urged to demand and stick to democracy, not necessarily because their problems will suddenly disappear, but mainly because they are going to gain their voice, their humanity imbedded in their freedom to air their opinion (freedom of speech) and freedom to walk free on the streets without being in chains for no crimes. At the scene of the Poverty Street protest against the local government administrator Joshua has said, “we have a right to complain to him, even though we didn’t vote him into office” (Habila 2002:131), but the treatment the protesters receive shows the reverse. It shows them and everyone beyond any doubts that they have no rights whatsoever to complain, because they never voted him into office. His allegiance is not to

the people to whom democratic power belongs, but to the military head of state who appoints him to superintend over the area, and whose power ultimately comes from the barrels.

Lomba's formation is anecdotal. It schools our mind and makes us more aware that media gagging and denial of freedom of speech is the worst thing that could happen to any society as that translates to slavery. Lomba laments helplessly that, "Now I realized that I really had no 'self' to express; that self had flown away from me the day the chains touched my hands" (Habila 2002:25). Lomba's visit to Badagry emphasizes the importance of voice in liberation of any human society; as a destructive weapon against every form of oppression.

You see, every oppressor knows that wherever one word is joined to another word to form a sentence, there'll be revolt. That is our work, the media: to refuse to be silenced, to encourage legitimate criticism wherever we find it (Habila 2002:150).

This can only be realized in a democracy. It is this demand for liberation; the dire need to revolt against the oppressive forces that lands Lomba in prison.

Another idea *Waiting for an Angel* pursues that will entrench new order is making the people realise the power they acquire through unity and education. This could be seen in two incidents of Poverty Street tenants who demand decent living and the intellectuals' resistance of the oppressors. Edebor (2013) and Okpliya (2014) admit that revolutionary tone of the novel lies in the unity exhibited by the oppressed class to rise against the oppressive system. For Edebor (2013:19):

Habila has not [only] reflected the struggles of the African masses but also provides the way forward, affirming that not even death should stop people from rejecting oppression. The author shows that it is only when people do this that freedom can be guaranteed

Similarly, Okpiliya (2014:202) argues that “the resistance demonstrated by the oppressed class is in itself a revolutionary process of growth.”

Habila, in the novel, urges the oppressed Nigerian masses to embrace unity and education as two veritable weapons to fight back their oppressors. Foremost, like the occupants of Poverty Street, Nigerians and the generality of Africans have to eschew tribal, religious, occupational, and gender divide and remain a united entity, where every individual must contribute their best in the quest for a new system. However, education is given a prideful place as a galvanizing tool. In Poverty Street, for instance, Joshua is seen to be a motivator, an organizer, and a spokesman of the people; and he is respected for his quality of possessing the intellectual capacity, so also Mao his friend.

Writers, publishers and editors are also seen using their intellectual tool to confront the oppressive system. They are found to be in solidarity with one another in whatever travails the military subjects them. The message is clear: divided we fall, united we win our common enemy. Therefore, even in the face of democracy, we must embrace education and unity to be able to surmount the daunting challenge of bad governance.

Conclusion

Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* is an account of developmental trajectory of Lomba the protagonist, through varied stages and experiences prescribed as Bildungsroman structure/features. The climax of Lomba's formation is awareness of the fact that he and fellow citizens of the country, Nigeria, can never experience freedom and actualisation of their self-ambition because their vision is "ambushed", unless they take practical actions to shake off, to break the manacles of military autocracy. This psychological awareness informs his firm decision to appear at the local government secretariat being the scene of Poverty Street demonstration to provide the needed press coverage, which he had earlier cancelled. Obviously, he is not oblivious of the possible attack and arrest of demonstrators as well as press men and women, however, he believes that it is an austere period when intellectuals cannot afford to sit and think alone; they should rather lead in practical motivation, reorientation, and confrontation of the brutal political forces.

The novel, therefore, is not only a Bildungsroman because it depicts various formative stages and features characteristic of Bildungsroman genre, but a political one. As a political Bildungsroman, it functions as a literary tool – a weapon – in the hand of the novelist to stir revolution. He does this surreptitiously though his extensive use of stream of consciousness technique that paves way for us to look deep into the psychic recesses of Lomba and other characters. His various developmental ordeals such as riots on university campus, death of Bola's parents and Bola's eventual insanity as a result of the traum, lack of job, loss of his girls, especially Alice, and so on, and his eventual incarceration and his prison accounts are enough to stir change of perception and attitude towards military participation in politics. The experience of residents of Poverty Street is a clarion call for

unity and the power of unity of purpose among the citizens. The selfless actions of characters like Joshua and Brother are evidence of the threat force of patriotism, motivation, and cohesion pose to oppressive and suppressive powers. These are practical and ideological effects the novelist intends to achieve. In these lies the revolutionary power of *Waiting for an Angel* as a Bildungsroman.

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