

A ROMANTICISM FISSURE IN ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

REBECCA KENSEH DANIEL IRANY (PhD)

Department of English and Literary Studies

Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria

e.irany@tsuniversity.edu.ng

+2348104459768

&

PATIENCE DIAH PETER

Department of English and Literary Studies

Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria

patiencepeterdiah@gmail.com

+2348135953475

Abstract

Adichie's twenty first century post-colonial African writing, a Romantic writing; explored and successfully projected the ideology that had swept through Europe from the seventeenth century and swayed itself to modern times and all over the world. The conflict that generates in Pre-Romantic and Romantic studies of the dwelling of God as captured by Frye's structure of imagery and how Adichie's Purple Hibiscus has captured it is the focus of this study. The Fissure in Adichie's work that exposed the Romantic Ideology places God within man and is juxtaposed with the Pre-Romantic structure (Christian dogma) where God's dwelling is placed in Heaven, a place where man must follow to attain through the religion, morality and virtue to achieve to meet with God. These paths are already stipulated and unquestionable and therefore can be misinterpreted and abused as exposed by Adichie in the studied work, an ideology which she has rejected fully in the death of the Patriarch who symbolizes that belief. The study concluded that in Adichie's Romantic flare, she portrayed successfully the God that is within man that guides us to do right and to create. In doing that one will attain to the highest freedom explored by Romantic thoughts.

Keywords: Romantic(ism); Fissure, Pre-Romantic(ism), Adichie, Purple Hibiscus.

Introduction

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* has a wide range of critical interpretation. The novel, written in the post-colonial Nigeria has an extraordinary Romanticism Fissure that has become visible to the critical eye. Within the context of the structure of her narrative impetus; emphasis is laid by this research on the representation of the conflict generated on the dwelling place of God; this is the crack to go through to bring home the Romanticism ideology embedded within the symbolic and thematic conformation of the novel in study. In Northrop Frye's cadre or framework of imagery of the pre-romanticism writers that has generated conflict with the romanticism writers; where the division of beings is categorized into four, the place where God resides is stipulated "The highest level is heaven, the place of the presence of God." (123), this framework places God outside of man. Romanticism writers on the other hand, place God differently. Romanticism and Romantic are used inter-changeably.

Romanticism is a literary theory; a (historical) movement in Literature and arts that emerged in Europe in the seventeenth or eighteenth century depending on critics. It came into being as a reaction to and a rejection of rationalism, classicism, enlightenment and industrialization. Madaki and Li in their essay: "The Wandering Jew in the Novels of Jane Austen" put it thus:

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, literature was gradually moving away from classical or religious affiliations to circular thematic concerns, ...Romanticism ...and its ideology began to spread, ... in the religious conventions, the political arena, the rise and fall of revolutions, wars, betrayals just to mention a few... These themes occupy the works of Romantic poets like Lord Byron, William Blake, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Percy Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (104)

In American Romanticism, it is said that Romanticism emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century and that it was a response to and against rationalism and the growing industrialism, Romanticism searches for freedom, a kind of freedom that revolts against classicism and all forms of conventions that define authority:

Romanticism was an artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century ...As a movement, romanticism involved a revolt against convention and authority and a search for freedom in personal, political, and artistic life. The romantics reacted against the rationalism of Enlightenment culture and the impersonality of growing industrialism. (American Romanticism 1)

In the subject of the place of God's dwelling, there are many contradictions on the dwelling place of God. Some romantics believe in God but find it difficult to find his place of dwelling in the structure of their imagery. In Romanticism, Transcendentalism, & Gothic Literature Part 1: Romanticism, their views were expounded thus:

The Romantics found inspiration through the natural world. Estranged from traditional religious beliefs, the romantics looked upon nature as the dwelling place of God. God and the natural universe were considered to be one and the same. They perceived nature as a metaphor for the sublime power and mystery of forces that inspire solace and self-discovery (12)

Religion and romanticism has many ties and many romantic poets don't separate them. It is a way of expressing their thoughts and their artistic genius. Beatriz González Moreno states in *The Sublime Search: The Aesthetic Manifestation of the Numinous* that "Religion shall mean for us the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine." (2) For Wordsworth, mind or spirit here has become largely secular; God appears - if at all - only as within man's mind and Abrams recalls a rich seventeenth - century tradition that resists any attempt to place God outside ourselves (qtd. Rosen: 21). T. E. Hulme believes that the Romantics don't believe in god so they say that man is god. (qtd in Madaki and Li 106-107) For Austen, the symbolic representation of God in her works is in the "Father" figure. (Madaki and Li 106-107). The Romantic ideology shares similarity with Christianity. The similarity is

on the inwardness or the conflict that ensures in the creative industry of the mind; the struggle which Author Lovejoy calls “civil war in the cave of man’s soul.” He says:

Another recognized characteristic of Christianity, and therefore of the “Romantic” was ethical dualism, a conviction that there are in man’s constitution two natures ceaselessly at war ...directly related to this, it was perceived, was the “inwardness” of Christianity, its pre-occupation with “the heart” as distinguished from the outward act, its tendency to introspection and hence ... “romantic” art has discovered, ... the inexhaustible realm of the inner life of man (49)

Frye argues that these romantic similarities with the Christian imagery are not in itself a change in belief “but in the special projection of reality...it is in itself simply a way of arranging images and providing for metaphors” (124). He further explains that “if a Romantic poet ...wishes to write of God, he has more difficulty in finding a place to put him” (126). In American Romanticism, the critics describe the romantic God thus: “Unlike the deistic God, the Romantic God is typically more dynamic and more immediately present, both in nature and the self.” (1)

Putting Adichie’s work within the romantic framework is to saddle the romantic broom with the job of sweeping through the thematic concerns within the novel. The romantic ideology has shifted and broadened since the time of the romantic poets even though most of the early romantic writers were poets and tried to protect the romantic ideology and believed it is better expressed within the structure of their imagery. According to Rosen (qtd) in Madaki and Li: “Abrams expounds ideas in Romantic poetry that lose all vitality when reduced to plain prose that cats and dogs can read” (27), Frye’s opinion is that Romanticism is a selective term even in its application to creative arts (122) and that romantic thoughts are projected through the language of imagery and is difficult to adapt to the novel, (128). Jerome McGann differs and argues that “Today ...debate about the theory of romanticism is vigorous from cultural studies, feminist scholarship, even from various types of revived philological investigations.” (147), and Geoffrey Hartman agrees with him and prophecies to open up Romanticism to what he calls “analytical spirit” and believes that where literature is concerned, it belongs to the future “The future belonged to the analytic spirit, to irony, to prose” (144). Later Romantics and critics expand the Romanticism canon to include many things allowing authors like Adichie in modern times to fit in and translate the ideologies of Romanticism, breaking all barriers of Culture, Era and Genre. Thus agreeing with Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn in introducing the book *Redrawing Boundaries* to speak of the force of literature that transcends time, era, space and ideological establishments

Foregrounding the issue of boundaries has reminded us that literature is not something given once and for all but something constructed and reconstructed, the product of shifting conceptual entitlements and limits. Not only is the canon of literary works in any genre fashioned by a simultaneous perambulation and transgression of boundaries but the very concept of the literary is itself continually renegotiated. (5)

Frye treats Romanticism as a historical movement in time and warns we should avoid the two traps in the phrase “history of ideas”. First, an idea, as such, is independent of time and can be argued about; an historical event, is not and can never be. If Romanticism is in part an historical event, as is clearly is ...” (123), we must avoid to interpret it as ideas but even if it is a moment in history, McGann argued in his “Romanticism and its Ideology” that in its historical slate, Romanticism transcends socio-historical times and is useful to our generation because it true to itself like many historical movements and also because it is different. “The works of romantic art, like the work of any historical movement “transcend” their particular socio-historical position ... only because they have localized themselves” (108). He went further to explain that

In this fact... paradox fundamental to all works of art which is best revealed through an historical method of criticism transcend their age and speak to alien cultures because they are so completely true to themselves, because they are time and space specific, because they are from our point of view, different. Works of the past are relevant in the present ... precisely because of this difference. (108-9)

Romanticism has transcended age and culture as stated earlier. Adichie’s romantic impetus lies in her challenge of the placement of God as an external entity that controls the affairs of mankind and expects a moral attainment to rise to his abode and a certainty to punish failure. She rejects like Frye and the romantics the unquestionable organs, agencies such as the “Sacrament of religion, the moral law, and the habit of virtue” (106), Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* positions God “In the Faces of Children” (*Purple Hibiscus*185), or “Within Us” (*Purple Hibiscus* 145)

Romanticism even among the poets and critics have different meaning and applicability that Author Lovejoy’s celebrated view that “The word romantic has come to mean many things that, by itself, it means nothing” (38) becomes important, therefore his suggestion of the use of the word Romanticism in the plural is essential. Madaki and Li push forward the view that “The thematic subject, nationality, form, style, application and era of Romanticism keep expanding and the plurality of Romanticism becomes inevitable and it becomes impossible to define or give any one meaning to the term ‘Romanticism’ in isolation.” (105) Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, therefore can fit into the romantic ideology chiefly by the thematic difficulty of identifying where to place God.

Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* has been known for its feminist, Marxist, Post-colonial as well as psycho-analytic touch. Thematic subjects such as abuse, military dictatorship, religious hypocrisy, love, silence, patriarchy and family have been a subjects of discussion among many critics. This work will treat the subject of God and where he resides as a motif within the framework of romantic ideology. Adichie throughout the work uses Kambili’s active and analytical mind to find her way round and around religion and religious practices known to her, and pushes her way through the romantic door to challenge the status-quo in the Nigerian post-colonial religious autonomy.

This religious autonomy in Adichie’s work exposes the fanatical religious practice where God is in Heaven, the outside of man and man must rise above the moral dilemma which the

“sacraments of religion, the moral law, and the habit of virtue, none of them strictly human inventions” (Frye 126) has prescribed to rise to heaven or sink below to hell. This she exposes through the character of Kambili narrating her experience, family dynamics and her social and religious relations. Kambili’s active mind and passive response to the experiences that has shaped her towards the conflict that enveloped her life agrees with the romantic subject which according to Encyclopedia Britannica on romantic characteristics “a focus on ...her passion and inner passions” or as Lovejoy calls it “civil war in the cave of man’s soul”. Kambili does not make sense of anything around her. That is Adichie’s deliberate style; to create an active mind where things don’t make sense at all times because it does not have to make sense; especially Kambili’s father’s expression of the sacraments of religion, moral laws and virtue of which Kambili questions through the Kambili’s mind. Papa, Kambili’s father questions Kambili and her elder brother Jaja: “Did you desecrate your Christian tongue?” Kambili’s response is “I sat frozen; I did not know that tongues could be Christian too.” (*Purple Hibiscus* 77)

Kambili’s confrontation and conflict of the place and dwelling of God occasioned when she and her brother visited their aunt, their father’s sister, Ifeoma in Nsukka and met with Reverend Father Amadi.

Experience

Adichie’s drift into the romantic world has push this research to generate the data within her work that elucidates the conflict of the placement of God. This conflict in the romantic era is generated when the poet wants to place God. This is to say that the existence and place of God is the work of the mind where all creation takes place: “if a Romantic poet, therefore, wishes to write of God, he has more difficulty in finding a place to put him... and on a whole, he prefers to do without a place, or finds “within” metaphors more reassuring “than up there” metaphors” (Frye 126). This is seen in Father Amadi seeing God in the “faces of his boys” (*Purple Hibiscus* 185) or “within us” (*Purple Hibiscus* 145).

In trying to understand the background and experience of Kambili; where Papa, her father is the principal catalyst that shaped her creative mind, creating for Kambili a picture of God and his dwelling. In Kambili’s creative mind “were reality is brought into being by experience” (Frye 106), she sees God as an external being whose dwelling is in heaven and who at any time can call her or speak to her in a British accent. (*Purple Hibiscus* 186)

Relationship with God

Adichie’s discussion of Kambili’s relationship with God and the experiences pushes for what the romantics rejected, In Romanticism, Transcendentalism, & Gothic Literature Part 1: Romanticism, it was said that: “The authors of the new romantic movement rejected the ordered rationality of the writings of the puritans” (Power Point 6) and also that of rationalism and the age of reasoning (Power Point 6). Kambili’s relationship with God was defined by her experience growing up in a Fanatical Catholic background of which her father, family and others around her belong to. The responsibilities and relationships within the faith is already spelled out and explained or imposed by those who interpret them; in the case of Kambili, her father is the first to interpret and then the Reverend Fathers and Sisters and her duty is to obey these unquestionable agencies of religious establishments. “In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the agencies which helped to raise man ... were such things as the sacraments of

religion, the moral law, and the habit of virtue, none of them strictly human inventions. These were safe and unquestionable agencies..." (Frye 126) the human world are the "...city of God" (Frye 126) this human world is not made of man "But in the older construct this world was ordinarily not thought of as human in origin or conception" (Frye 126). Kambili's father interprets the supposed injunctions of the external God and pushes for extreme sacrifice to rise to the level of meeting with God and receiving his reward instead of punishment. For Papa Eugene, one must avoid "Sin" at all cost in order to fall into God's good books.

The place and dwelling of God

Kambili's understanding of God was challenged when she met with the charismatic Catholic Reverend Father Amadi. It started in a discussion at the dinner table with father Amadi. Kambili's cousins, Amaka and Obiora, Auntie Ifeoma's children were arguing about the appearance of the Virgin Mary in Aokpe. They laughed at the fact that she was appearing only in Europe but now she has finally decided to appear in Africa. Many people go to where she appears for pilgrimage. Father Amadi debunked the assertion that she only appears in Europe and said: "But she appeared in Egypt, Amaka. At least people flocked there, like they are flocking to Aokpe now. *O bugoni*, like migrating locusts" (*Purple Hibiscus* 145) Amaka: "You don't sound like you believe, Father." (*Purple Hibiscus* 145) Father Amadi: "I don't believe we have to go to Aokpe or anywhere else to find her. She is here; she is within us, leading us to her Son." (*Purple Hibiscus* 145-146) Father Amadi's contact with divinity is within. He represents the Romantic ideology that preaches that God is within us. Kambili's experience and her cousins on the other hand depict a God that is in the outside of man and has be sought after. The only possibility of a communion is via service and rising above our moral dilemma.

In the relationship of the two characters Adichie is able posit her romantic ideology of internalizing God. Kambili and father Amadi went out to stadium to play or rather watch the young boys that father Amadi trains to play football. Kambili describes the children as boys "with shorts that had holes in them and shirts washed so often I didn't know what colour they had originally been and similar crusty sports from insect bites on their legs." (*Purple Hibiscus* 184) Father Amadi projecting the romantic ideology unfolds to Kambili: "I see Christ in their faces, in the boys' faces." (*Purple Hibiscus* 185), Kambili on the other hand cannot reconcile the Christ she knows and the Christ Father Amadi is alluding to; the one he sees in the face of the poor children. She knows only the God that exists outside of man. Kambili thought to herself. "I could not reconcile the blond Christ hanging on the burnished cross in ST. Agnes and the sting-scarred legs of those boys" (*Purple Hibiscus* 185). Kambili wanted to understand him well because her truth has been disrupted; the truth of who God is and where He is situated. So she enquired further of his calling:

Why did you become a Priest? ... [Then she thought] Of course he had got the call, the same call that all the Reverend Sisters in school talked about when they asked us to always listen to the call when we pray. Sometimes I imagine God calling me, his rumbling voice British- accented. He would not say my name right; like father Benedict, he would place the emphasis on the second syllable rather than the first (*Purple Hibiscus* 186).

Kambili understanding of God and his dwelling is that he dwells in heaven, not within man, therefore God has to speak to you from the outside and you listen. "Sometimes I imagine God

calling me, his rumbling voice British- accented" (*Purple Hibiscus* 186). Kambili observed and opened a conversation with father Amadi. She wanted to push further on the conflict that has captured her mind: "You believe in those boys. I blurted out", Father Amadi affirmed his believe. He said: "And they don't need me to believe in them as much as I need it for myself." (*Purple Hibiscus* 231) Kambili asked further because her curiosity was heightened. Father Amadi responded and re-affirmed his believe "Because I need to believe in something that I never question" (*Purple Hibiscus* 231). Father Amadi's believe in the boys is symbolic of his believe in God. Father Amadi does not see God as different from those boys. He sees God in them and so he needed to believe in something he cannot question, something that is absolute; God in the faces of those children, in the inside of those children. To him God is multiplied; is in plural and is in all of us. Within us. "Unlike the deistic God, the Romantic God is typically more dynamic and more immediately present, both in nature and the self. Estranged from traditional religious beliefs, the romantics looked upon nature as the dwelling place of God". Adichie's character Kambili may not have a sweeping change in belief but there is a change that has taken place in her life as well as her brothers; a revolutionary spirit within which the romantics play. "The notion of the inwardness of creative power is inherently revolutionary (Frye 129) Adichie portrays dutifully the debt of Kambili's internal struggle and her ability to create another reality in her mind. Realities that is separate from their present reality. Even though their religious culture strives within, there is a different kind of silence that hangs over them; a kind of silence that according to Kambili lets her breath. "Silence hangs over us, but a different kind of silence, one that lets me breathe" (*Purple Hibiscus* 309), that silence is revolutionary. The sense of identity with a larger power of creative energy meets us everywhere in romantic culture (Frye 129). That silence is the one that gives her peace and pushes for Kambili to believe in Father Amadi and everything that he says; that includes his believe that God is in the inside of mankind. "And I believed it, I believed him... I believe what father Amadi says; I believe the firm slant of his handwriting. Because he has said it and his word is true" (*Purple Hibiscus* 106). This affirms Adichie's romantic creative spirit.

Conclusion

Finally, Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* has dived into the romantic waters and re-affirms the ideology that places God within man, as man, with the creative power to make and to do whatever man wants. The change that occurred in Kambili is not a profound change in believe but in the spatial projection of reality. This in turn leads to a different localizing of the various levels of that reality (Frye 124). Adichie expresses a different kind of relation to God in the character of Kambili, Kambili experiences a different kind of freedom... a freedom to be, to do" (*Purple Hibiscus* 24), this kind of freedom, Adichie projects can only be gotten from the romantic believe of the creative power that is within us "The presence of God in the self..." as slated by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling in his early romantic writings and seen in all of us not the one that identifies God as sitting is heaven and expecting us to behave in a certain way as projected in the character of Papa. Papa tells Kambili "Because God has given you much, he expects much from you. He expects perfection" (*Purple Hibiscus* 54). That belief is rejected by Adichie. The killing of Papa by his wife and the success of Kambili's recognition of the place of God and the freedom within Kambili that allows her to create her world symbolizes the romantic fissure in *Purple Hibiscus*.

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