

AESTHETICS OF REALISM IN AMMA DARKO'S *FACELESS*

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Abstract : The main focus of this paper has been to uncover the manner in which socio-political and economic realities in postcolonial Ghana come to be represented in Amma Darko's *Faceless* and, consequently, to try to point out the different mechanisms used by the author to achieve this goal. This article deems Darko's *Faceless* as a highly utilitarian art that dwells on the socio-political and economic realities of Ghana. In this article, efforts are meant to show how Darko's *Faceless* depicts Ghanaian realities and the different techniques she used to fictionalize Ghanaian society in her novel. The paper has also pointed out how Amma Darko artfully used characters, settings and events to appear realistic and believable. The paper has the merit to show how Amma Darko using some literary techniques such as narrative ones, characterization, setting has reflected the realities of her contemporary Ghanaian society. The paper has revealed that it is an implicit attack of the tangible realities that the novelist highlights throughout her literary creation.

Resumé : Cet article révèle la manière dont les réalités sociopolitiques et économiques du Ghana postcolonial sont représentées dans *Faceless* de Amma Darko. Cet article considère *Faceless* de Amma Darko comme un art très utilitaire qui traite des réalités sociopolitiques et économiques du Ghana. Le travail a montré comment Amma Darko à travers ce roman, représente les réalités ghanéennes dans sa fiction et les différentes techniques utilisées afin de parvenir à cette fin. Ce travail essaie de montrer comment la romancière recourt aux techniques littéraires pour peindre les réalités de la société ghanéenne contemporaine. L'étude révèle qu'il s'agit vraisemblablement d'une attaque implicite des réalités tangibles que l'auteure montre à travers sa création littéraire

Introduction

The deterioration of socio-political and economic situations of most African countries compels many writers to resort to literature in order to arouse the leaders' awareness on these issues.

Amma Darko, being a scout and a product of her society did not remain aloof before these alarming situations. She resorts to literature to identify the problems of her society and suggest suitable solutions. It is therefore, a weapon against sadness and despair. Amma Darko using some literary techniques such as narrative technique, characterization, setting has pictured the realities of her contemporary Ghanaian society. Literary works are portrayals of the thinking patterns and social norms prevalent in society. Her stylistic portrayal of the different sequences and her manipulation of language in the novel make it a realistic novel whereby verisimilitude makes its room.

Verisimilitude in literary work is used to describe the situation whereby the story is presented in such a way that the characters, settings and events sound realistic. The writer uses her novel as a story that bears some relationship with the concepts of truth or of value which she espouses. As a Ghanaian prolific writer, she consistently uses the medium of prose fiction to cross-examine the complexity and enormity of Ghanaian problems.

The analysis of the plot, characterization, and the use of language, tone, humor and the setting of the novel reveals that it is an implicit attack of the tangible realities that the novelist reveals throughout her literary creation. Her manipulation of language in the novel enlightens the reader to view how the novel tackles Ghanaian society's neglect of its future leaders, the irresponsibility of some parents and the importance of self-determination. Her skillful use of language and other literary techniques had made it possible to blatantly portray how a large portion of the population has been abandoned. This large segment includes children who live in the streets because of their parents' and government irresponsibility.

The purpose of this paper is to show how Amma Darko has used this novel to reflect social realities in her Ghanaian society. Furthermore, this paper seeks to exhibit how the novelist uses her art to arouse the consciousness of her contemporary world.

Literature adds to reality and does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides. It irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become. As regards to the above objectives, stylistics and Semiotics are the literary theories used to conduct this study. Stylistics is defined by N. Norgaard et al (2010, p.25) as “the study of the ways in which meaning is created through language in literature as well as in other types of text”. This theory will help us study the various techniques the novelist utilizes in her literary productions. Semiotics is according to MacCannel and J. Flower (1982, p.99) “a literary work can be conceived as a kind of sign that gives birth to other signs”. Texts engender readings which as interpretants are also texts.” In semiotics, every narrative element - whether made up of words, gestures or images - thus corresponds to a sign that needs decoding in order to provide its meaning.

1. Character Creation as Aesthetics for Portraying Ghanaian Realities in Amma Darko's *Faceless*

Before entering into the core elements of this chapter, it is important to have a glance at aesthetics in literature as defined by Akim:

Aesthetics in literature is a tool, more, an arm in the hands of the author that he uses to reach a desired goal, in a discursive situation. Conscious that what counts for him is not only the ideas he shares with the reader but also the way he puts them choosing his literary devices. Thus, he chooses his words, the places he wants the characters to move in, his mode of persuading the reader, the dosage of description, narration, dialogue and discussion (A. F. Raimi, 2017, p.2)

As the above quotation stipulates, writers use various techniques to convey their message in their literary productions. Here, Amma Darko utilizes the means of character creation and other literary devices to express her anger and dissatisfaction on how children are abandoned and threatened without any care

though their parents are still alive. The different names given to characters in the novel contextually mean a lot. These names sound familiar to the setting and the reader doesn't need to make effort before getting their messages. Through the depiction of the various characters, the roles played, one can have a sense of edification. In her writings, she has consistently sought to portray the plights of the contemporary Ghanaian society especially, the phenomenon of street children. She has used this channel to teach her counterparts the formal ways to come with this social phenomenon gnawing Ghanaians as whole. (A. F. Raimi, 2017, p.4). When we take the *heroine* of this novel who is nothing but Kabria, her name 'Kabria' sounds natural and familiar to Ghanaians. According to Ghanaian customs and traditions, the name Kabria means *heroine*, the role model and a hard worker. This literary meaning of the name matches with her role or the different actions she undertakes in the construction of the story of the novel. Kabria symbolizes Ghanaian woman ready to sacrifice herself for the welfare of her family. Afrifa Sekyere has it that:

Kabria represents the playwright's idea of good womanhood. Although she is not a degree holder like her husband she is nevertheless the voice of reason and respecter of persons. She appears to be the moderating influence in the novel. This assertion can be confirmed in her interactions with her husband, Fofu, Abena, Obea, Essie, Out, Maa Tsuru, Na Yomo and other characters in the novel...(A. Sekyere, 2014, p.373)

This Sekeyere's quotation tells and lays bare the crucial role played by Kabria in this Darko's fictional society which is nothing but Ghanaian society. The novelist uses the character of Kabria to project what a good woman ought to be in spite of the hardship life presents to her. In spite of her husband's irresponsibility, Kabria dutifully accomplishes her role toward her husband and Fofu. Kabria's attitude in her society as a whole and towards her husband in particular translates exactly what Ghanaian women do. Through this, it becomes apparent that Amma Darko as a literary sculptor uses fiction to depict realistic events which take place in most African societies in general and Ghanaian society in particular. Kabria is a degree holder but this did not prevent her from being a

submissive woman. Both educations come together to make Kabria a good woman and this reinforces the view that formal and parental education are deemed as determinant in the making of one's personality. The two types of educations contribute to the making of Kabria as a true African woman.

Another element to be pointed out is the writer's will to use this novel as a challenge to traditional gender roles attached to African women. Through the depiction of Kabria, one can amply say that Amma Darko had driven out the stereotypic ideas in African societies. Amma's skillful portrayal of Kabria makes it clear that Kabria embodies the hardship and predicaments of African women in patriarchal African societies. In such patriarchal societies like the one portrayed in this novel, women's dominance is ubiquitous. This depiction of women in this Amma's fictional world goes in line with Ghanaian society where man is deemed as god and empowered by the traditional rules to use his wife as it pleases him. The image of Kabria as shown in this novel reinforces the stance according to which a writer is a product of his or her society. Whatever he or she reveals in his or her fictional world is the transposition of what really takes place in the real world. Francis Mowang Ganyi in his article published in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* establishes a closely link between art or literature with human community in the following terms:

Art is thus seen as the life blood of a community which encapsulates their world view, ethical and moral standards. Art becomes the means by which the ideology of the community is expressed. Therefore, the aesthetics of artistic production becomes a basic consideration in defining what art is relevant as an appropriate representation of communal or national values (F. M. Ganyi, 2014, p.1)

This thought of Ganyi clearly shows the relationship between literary producer and the society from which he emanates. Amma Darko as a literary sculptor uses this novel to unravel the prevalent situation in post-colonial Ghana whereby the masses are compelled to live in abject poverty. Through literary creation, we are informed about the real situation Ghanaians live as a result of the neglect of socio-political and religious leaders. Darko's manipulation of language helps the

reader to discover the tangible realities in which Ghanaian people live due to the irresponsibility of their political leaders. This irresponsibility of the leaders affects the population at each level. The amplification of street children phenomenon is closely related to the level of poverty arising from the unequal distribution of the continent's wealth. Darko's characters and their personalities match with Ghanaian realities and help to grasp Darko's message in *Faceless*. She uses this novel as a channel through which she depicts the contemporary Ghanaian realities. As a literary sculptor, Amma Darko takes literature as a relevant means of raising means of raising readers' awareness on the burning issues in her country.

In this respect, literature played a crucial role in the recovery of national identity in the struggle for gender equality. Literature is not a mere tool of entertainment but rather a medium of social and even political change, the real task of the writer. Darko succeeds her mission as a literary sculptor in fictionalizing the actual Ghanaian society in her literary creation, *Faceless*. She uses literature to reflect the reality of her society and as adequate means for solving and responding the needs of her society. In this sense, Ngugi's view on literature is worth mentioning:

Literature results from conscious acts of men in society. At the level of the individual artist, the very act of writing implies a social relationship: one is writing about somebody for somebody. At the collective level, literature, as a product of men's intellectual and imaginative activity embodies, in words and images, the tensions, conflicts, contradictions, at the heart of a community's being and process of becoming. It is a reflection on the aesthetic and imaginative planes, of a community's wrestling with its total environment to produce the basic means of life, food, clothing, shelter, and in the process creating and recreating itself in history. (N. w. Thiong'o, 1981, pp. 5-6.)

From the aforementioned passage, it is crystal clear that literary work such as novel is useful in the awareness-raising process. It is used here by Amma Darko to reflect the realities in her country. She does this so that whoever reads this novel will be aware of the various challenges faced by Ghanaians every day.

Another character worth discussing is Poison also known as (A. Darko, 2003, p.8) “the Lord of the street”. As his name sounds it negatively, the different actions undertaken by this character are mischievous. One can wonder the impact of names on those who carry them. Poison is known as a harmful substance that can cause the death of human beings. Under normal circumstances, a human being should not carry such name. Amma Darko by giving such name to this character would like her readership to pay attention on such characters. Amma Darko uses Poison as a hardened criminal and by the way, calling people’s attention on the negative role such a character can play among human beings. Amma Darko’s novel, *Faceless* has been used to retract and retract Africans’ lives. This responds to one of the roles of literary work. Caitlin Skvorc in his work devoted to the importance of literary creations has it that:

I study literature because I believe there is power in stories. Literature is both intensely personal as well as a communal experience. I love examining how words, sentences, characters, plot-lines and tropes reveal who we are as humans. Humanity is a complicated thing, and requires an infinite amount of words to describe and analyze. That's the joy of studying literature; there is always a new reality to discover. (C. Skvorc, 2012, p.19)

Literature has prompted political and social change in societies and continues to do so this day. It can be a battle cry for the proletariat to rise up and make a difference, and it can also provide personal counsel. Through this novel, new reality of the contemporary Ghana can be discovered and this thanks to Amma Darko’s artistic creations. This female writer’s artistic representation of events in this novel helps the reader to clearly understand the situation prevailing in Ghana. Artfully, Amma Darko has been able to realistically portray social events gnawing Ghanaian society as a result of the neglect of some parents as well as the irresponsibility of the political leaders who hold the country in hostage after its independence. Amma Darko’s ability to blend romance with realism can be compared to Fagunwa as quoted in the following:

But it is as a novelist that Fagunwa won the prime of place among the writers of his time. By his use of beautiful expressions and his vivid

descriptions of events and places, by his ability to blend romance with realism nicely, and by his use of both traditional materials and borrowed elements with outstanding success in his novels, he towers above all creative writers in Yoruba before him, and wins for himself an eminent position among all Yoruba writers" (F. Olabimtan, 1988, p. 14).

The relationship between text and society has been demonstrated by Amma Darko, because through her novel, it is clear that textual studies should not be confined to their aesthetic qualities but considerable attention should also be given to the texts' sociological background in order to achieve a holistic appreciation of its meaning. Deeming how Amma Darko has depicted and portrayed characters such as Poison helps the reader to view the intrinsic relationship between literary texts and society. She succeeds in blending fictional work with reality in her society. The way the character Poison is portrayed and the different roles he plays in the novel reveal the true nature of some Ghanaians. In his work devoted to this novel, Afrifa arguably posits that:

Somehow, however, Amma Darko's vision of social reality would not allow our world to be completely swallowed up in such total gloom. Through the narrative technique of encircling Baby-T's tragic end with Fofu's ultimate triumph, we are offered some hope, however fragile..... Amma Darko provides us with a workable alternative to the completely dysfunctional family unit. (A. Sekyere, 2014, p.385)

Through this, Afrifa sheds light on the crucial role played by Darko's *Faceless* in terms of how it offers solutions and alternative to Ghanaian society. This novel appears as a contributive novel for the phenomenon of streetism crippling most of African cities. She uses this novel to provide readers with a door into various issues of Africans and opens their minds on some of the burning issues they may forget. It does not kiss readers like other literary works but it touches the spinal cord of even the aloof leaders and converge them towards the resolutions of the myriads of African problems. In addition to the fact that the novel openly exposes the pimples and blemishes of humanity but it also shows the frightening lesson of the loss of the parents' moral authority over the future leaders who are nothing but their own children. This novel has been used as a means of discussing inherent problems of Ghanaians. In doing so, the writer intentionally establishes

link between literature and human society. She therefore, joins Abiola who thinks that “Literature takes place within a cultural setting, and no meaningful criticism is possible without the existence of a community of values shared by writer and critic which the latter can, in turn, make meaningful to the writer’s larger audience” (A. Irele, 1980, p.30). This means that a literary work has a link with whatever takes place in human community.

Set in Accra, Ghana, Amma Darko’s *Faceless* is a harshly realistic novel. She gives also a vivid portrayal of Accra marginal spaces and the people who inhabit them. The peripheral areas of Accra mainly Agboghloshie market, the destitute population, the impoverished residents and the powerless are the central focus of the story. The city of Accra is used as the crucial locus of social tensions, streetism. In the novel, Darko piles up sign after sign and uses them to show the worsening conditions of the street children in a neo-colonial African urban dwelling.

2. Setting as Aesthetic Representation of Ghanaian Living Conditions

Setting as defined by W. Pameessou (2013, p.121) is “the place where and time when the action of a play, novel or any other piece of creative writing takes place. Yet, the setting encapsulates social, cultural, political and religious interferences or implications”. In this respect, our appreciation of setting in this work will take into account the physical, mental, spiritual, social dimensions. In Darko’s *Faceless*, the events take place in some spaces which share the same similarities with the physical places in Ghana. The portrayal of places at which the events of this novel take place helps the reader to clearly understand the socio-political and moral situations of the post-colonial Ghana. Not only do these places help understand the miserable conditions of Ghanaians but also, they contribute to the awareness-raising of the leaders who neglect the future of the younger generation. It is in this perspective that Koffi says that:

The physical space in which the street children live conditions and reflects and models their way of life. In a first approach, we will

consider the space as it appears within the narrative and then deal with the population who inhabits it. It is important however to note that beyond the realities described within a work of art, the author wants to produce meanings. So, through these descriptions, we will perceive signs and symbols which will lead to understand the hidden causes in relation with the use of this place as a living home. (Kra J. K. Koffi, 2017, p.2)

From this quotation, we are informed about the pertinence of the places where the story takes place. The physical appearance of the places described in the novel contributes to the understanding of the author's message. The places as they appear in the novel describe the hidden agenda contained in Darko's 2003 novel. Sodom and Gomorrah connote a negative image. Biblically, Sodom and Gomorrah connote a place where every kind of sins and immorality exist. Sexual immorality, theft, murder and all kinds of the horrible things took place in that area. These two towns have been destroyed by God because of the increasing level of the horrible things. The place where most of the street children live or try to make a living is called Sodom and Gomorrah. These two places have a particular link with the rest of Accra city. They are depicted as precarious and miserable universes, filled with filth at physical and figurative meanings. No adequate toilet, but a sort of single toilet to which people run and queue up waiting for their turn to come as said by Darko in the following:

"Honestly", Oderlay snored, "Macho himself, where does he do it? He is a foolish man. Where does he want us to do it?" "He wants us to go to public toilet up there. Where else?" "Nonsense. Then why does he and his gang also go there? Who can walk that long distance to up there when the thing is coming with force?" "Ask again. And look at the long line of people too always there. Ah! Even if you go there at twelve midnight, you would find a queue" "That is why people sometimes do it on themselves while waiting for their turn. (A. Darko, 2003, p.6)

This passage depicts the miserable conditions of Sodom and Gomorrah as they appear in the novel. The novelist in depicting these places as she did surely would like to raise people's awareness on the real situation prevailing in most African cities in general and Accra in particular. A city where people ease themselves at the opened places shows the level of insecurity, the dirtiness characterizing these places. In Sodom and Gomorrah, there is no toilet. People do

From this aforementioned passage, it is clear that Amma Darko through this novel raises the attention of her readership as far as the link between fictional work and the society from which it emanates is concerned. It is therefore important to know that writers use their literary creations to deal and reflect the problems pertaining human societies. They resort to their literary works to show a clear link between literature and society. Amma Darko deserves praises for her skillful way with which she depicts realistically her society in her fiction.

In fiction, the fictional society becomes a background against which the personal relationships are studied and individuals are merely illustrations of the aspects of the way of life. Thus, Social theory is chosen to aid the analysis of Amma's depiction of the rural illiterate society in Ghana and Africa largely with a view to enunciating a social change for the better and a re-shaping of the moral decay visible in the novels as applicable to the real society (T. R. Terhemba, 2019, p.3)

Terhemba in this passage highlights the link Amma Darko establishes between her fiction and her society. It is clear that *Faceless* portrays the events taking place in Ghanaian society. It suffices to read this novel and one is aware of everything that takes place in this society which neglects the poor people especially, children who are the future leaders. Using the names of places which are familiar to Ghanaians, there is no doubt that the novel focuses on the myriads of problems destroying the contemporary Ghanaian society in particular and African society in general.

3. The Artistic Use of Language in Amma Darko's *Faceless*

The use of language is one of the means Amma Darko has utilized in her realistic portrayal of her Ghanaian society. She resorts to the use of language as key means for raising people's consciousness on the phenomenon of street children and the parents' irresponsibility as well as the political leaders' neglect of the future leaders. The novelist has used a clear and brilliant Ghanaian language which is accessible to Ghanaian people. She has from time to time, resorted to the vernacular as it takes place in Ghanaian culture where people regardless of their

backgrounds sometimes combine the two languages in their conversations. This way of writing gives the reader to feel at home and helps him have a sense of realism we have been talking so far. The reading of Amma Darko's *Faceless* leads the readership to understand the hidden agenda of the writer. There is no doubt that Amma Darko has a merit to be praised for her realistic depiction of Ghanaian society. It is in the same vein that A. Sekyere (2014, p.386) has it that:

Faceless is a well-researched novel, with the narration drawing on real-life events and places/slums like Agbogbloshie Market, Makola Market, Korle-Gonno, and the all-notorious Sodom and Gomorrah (named after the Biblical city that God destroyed because of its numerous sins) of all which are in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The characters are real and believable enough, ... I do believe the portrayal of such characters highlight the predominant truth and nastiness of the whole streetism and gang phenomena

Simply put, this passage confirms Amma Darko's ability of portraying realities in her fiction. Her skillful use of language contributes on a large scale to attracting readers' attention to the burning issues in Ghana. In addition, the novelist uses matters or issues that are ordinary in everyday life experiences and this makes things appear natural as well as realistic. The style used in this novel arouses the interests of the readership who further probes as the story unfolds to clearly understand the real situation of street children.

Another element worth mentioning is the narrative technique used to narrate the story. Amma Darko has used the third person singular to tell the story. To make her message available, the author uses the omniscient point of view and this allows her to enter in the mind of some characters to unveil what was supposed to be hidden. The third person omniscient point of view according to (<https://www.masterclass.com/articles>) is "the most open and flexible point of view available to writers. As the name implies, an omniscient narrator is all-seeing and all-knowing. While the narration outside of any one character, the narrator may occasionally access the consciousness of a few or many different characters". By this way, the narrator has been able to reveal the most frightening

message which is the total loss of parents' responsibility towards their children. The use of this omniscient point of view helps the writer to adapt the fictional realities to that of Ghanaian society. This omniscient narrative point allows the writer to highlight details about poverty, child abuse and neglect, defilement of girls, issues about gender, child prostitution, single parenthood, child labour and child trafficking; rape, violence and the dividends of a failed government.

Conclusion

This article has pointed out the different literary techniques Amma Darko has used to depict socio-political and economic as well as moral realities in the contemporary Ghanaian society. It has shown that the writer has used the character creation, the setting and language to realistically depict the unbearable situations of street children in Ghana after independence. Through this, the reader is informed about the hardship and the plights of street children. The paper has shown how the irresponsibility of some parents as well as the political leaders compels many children to go out in order to find their daily bread. The phenomenon of street children is alarmingly growing up in most African cities due to the neglect of some parents and the lack of vision of the leaders. Children of today are the future leaders therefore much more attention should be paid to them. Amma Darko's artfully manipulation of language makes things realistic and believable. This study calls the attention of the political leaders to pass laws for the better protection of street children. Efforts should be made to rescue these street children and offer them adequate jobs. Leaders should also pass laws which will compel parents to take care of their children and let parents know that it is their duty to take care of their children. Amma Darko's manipulation of language and her technical use of some literary techniques make this novel appear realistic and believable.

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