

EVOCATIVE NARRATIVE IN ADEKUNLE MAMUDU'S *THE BEAUTY OF MADNESS* AND SOPHIA AKHUEMOKHAN'S *CHANGING COLORS*

BY

Nosakhare Stefan Egbon

BA English and Literature, University of Benin, Nigeria.

nosakharestefan@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the narrative techniques; setting, focalization and flashback, employed by Adekunle Mamudu and Sophia Akhjemokhan in *The Beauty of Madness* and *Changing Colors* respectively, to arouse deep meanings and intense emotions. These techniques contribute to the message the writers intend to pass across to the readers. While Akhjemokhan uses these techniques in *Changing Colors* to teach morals and promote ethnic principles, Mamudu's aim in *The Beauty of Madness* is to expose some ills revolving in the society and launch sanity back to the society.

Introduction

The narrative technique is one of the numerous techniques employed by writers and storytellers to convey their message. Mamudu and Akhjemokhan use this technique to convey an evocative effect in their short stories' collections.

In commenting on the nature of the short story, the award-winning British author, William Boyd (2018) notes that the short story seem to answer something very deep in our nature as if for the duration of its telling, something special has been created, some essence of our experience extrapolated, some temporary sense has been made of our common, turbulent journey towards the grave and oblivion.

Evocative writing is a way of constructing research texts that arouse, conjure, or elicit vivid images, deep meanings and intense emotions. In Mamudu's *The Beauty of Madness* and Akhuemokhan's *Changing Colors*, both writers use setting, focalization and flashback to drive home their topics.

Setting, Focalization and Flashback in *The Beauty of Madness* and *Changing Colors*

Adekunle Mamudu's *The Beauty of Madness and Other Stories* is a collection of short stories with eight chapters. Mamudu begins each chapter with a new story which makes it unique and different from other short stories' collections. In Sophia Akhuemokhan's *Changing Colors*, all the stories beginning from "Changing Colors" and ending in "Curriculum" is narrated by a character, Melody. Unlike Mamudu's *The Beauty of Madness*, Akhuemokhan's *Changing Colors* is a series where each story is related to the one before it.

In "Preamble" in *Changing Colors*, Akhuemokhan uses this story to draw the attention of the reader into the action immediately. In the story, Melody is introduced as a police officer fleeing from the city to the mountains in her small jet. She narrates the story to Tabara, her daughter. The third-person point of view is employed and the geographical location is given as West Africa. The scenery in this story confirms the setting when she states thus;

Melody zoomed north towards a distant range of mountains, her eyes and ears at the alert. She was flying over the Savannah, table land, and if another aircraft, even another police pod like her own, attempted to intercept her she would gun it down. A screen on the dashboard gave her a side view of the city clouded in toxic gas. She drove forward.the mountains they were passing were massive and submerged in Jungle (1-2).

The use of mountains and savannah by Akhukemokhan further affirms the location in the “Preamble”.

In “The Magic of Money” by Adekunle Mamudu, the spatiotemporal and cultural setting is not stated as in *Changing Colors* by Sophia Akhukemokhan. Mamudu uses the third-person narrative point of view to enlighten his readers on the magic that money performs in the society. He tells the story of Chima who is “easily the ugliest man in the village” (3) and everyone reject associating with him. Chima is thirty-four and yet unmarried as even “Obiageli the cripple, rejects the offer to marry Chima.” (5). Although Mamudu does not state his setting in this story, it can be deduced. His use of “village” (3) shows that the setting is rural and not urban. Also, with the use of a town-crier, he confirms this setting. He puts thus;

On a hot, dull and peaceful afternoon, when the villagers had returned from their harvest fields, the town-crier’s gong sounded. Its suddenness and sharpness pierced the tranquility of the sleepy community. It roused the villagers from their various unexciting engagements as the town-crier’s indifferent voice announced that the village head wanted to address everyone at the village square. It was urgent; Ibe, the town-crier, said and whosoever did not attend would be fined (8).

From the above excerpt, it is deduced that the location of “The Magic of Money” is rural, with his use of a town-crier instead of the radio or television and a village square instead of a conference room.

Furthermore, the setting can be said to be the South-Eastern region of Nigeria precisely, with Mamudu’s use of characters’ names like Chima, Obiagele, Ibe, Ihuoma Obiajulu, Eze Obiajulu and Nne Chima and also his use of “Obam” (7) which means chimpanzee in Igbo language.

In “Changing Colours” by Akhukemokhan, the spatiotemporal and cultural setting is Raamses, Egypt, 1446 BC. Akhukemokhan gives a detailed setting with each story

being indicated twice; first in an italicized bible quotation and secondly, by an underlined sub-heading beneath the title. The setting of this story is an allusion to the times and locations of the bible. "Changing Colours" by Akhmemokhan is told from the first-person point of view, from the perspective of Neit who is eighteen, hot-tempered and of biracial ancestry. The religious background of this story is Exodus 2, which is the marriage between Moses and the Ethiopian woman. These techniques contribute to its theme of ethnic difference being a fact of nature that must be accommodated.

Also, in the story titled "Rock" by Sophia Akhmemokhan, the background alludes to 1 Kings Chapter 5 of the bible which is the story of the little maid who waited on Naaman's wife. The story is told from the third-person narrative point of view with Naomi being the central consciousness. Akhmemokhan makes use of flashback in this story to show how the character of Naomi, a seven-year-old black Jew, becomes a slave to lady Emmita. On their way to meet with Josiah to get a cure for the boil on lady Emmita's neck, Naomi sees a caravan of slaves passing. The narrator puts thus;

The slaves were a composite of tribes from the Euphrates to the coasts of Ethiopia. They limped along in the midst of a hundred sand flies, seldom raising their heads, Naomi stopped skipping. With a throbbing heart, she looked at the black slaves with all her might, searching their faces for a sign of familiarity. She searched again and again.... Naomi thought, 'if his voice wasn't loud, he would sound like mother'. A memory of home slipped into her mind, her village outlying Kedesh in northern Israel, dusk darkening the hills and fields, and herself on her fifth birthday, sitting on her mother's knees, snuggled against her mother's warmth in the safety of their lime stone hut (22).

From the above, Akhmemokhan employs the evocative technique of flashback to paint a clear picture of Naomi's first encounter with lady Emmita. She sees a caravan of slaves and remembers her own past. Through Akhmemokhan's use of flashback, the reader is meant to be sympathetic towards Naomi's present

predicament as she becomes a slave by force and not out of her own will. The spatiotemporal and cultural setting of this story is Damascus between 852 and 841 BC.

In “Long Time, no See” in *The Beauty of Madness and Other Stories*, Mamudu, unlike in “The Magic of Money”, gives a specific location as the setting of this short story. Using the third person narrative point of view, he states;

“Stanley had taken a bold step in life. He had quit his gainful employment as a media assistant in the Royal Newspaper Corporation to attend school so that he could meet up with his childhood friends and playmates who appeared to be doing very well especially in Lagos” (21).

The social environment of Lagos is obvious in this story as Stanley enrolls for “a diploma in business administration in the city polytechnic” (21), intends to work with “chevron or a high profile merchant bank” (22). Also, Mamudu introduces a flashback through the character of Stanley to show the reason for his actions. Stanley intends to be like Samson, his “secondary school classmate who is the song in Lagos, following his enormous wealth” (22). The social setting of Lagos is also seen when Samson’s driver hits another’s car on “Eko Bridge” (22) and is rewarded by Samson.

Furthermore, Akhmemokhan’s “Voices” is a story that is quite different from the others as she switches her use of focalization in this story. The narration of the story opens in the third-person narrative point of view with Adama as the central consciousness and then switches to the first-person narrative point of view when Adama tells Melis about her story of conspiracy. Speaking from the third-person narrative point of view at the beginning, Akhmemokhan puts thus;

“They stood before the wooden gate in an agony of waiting, keeping a look-out on the dark alley as well as the fortress-like walls guarding the buildings, above the walls, at a distance, they could vaguely discern the windows of the upper rooms of the main house” (48).

The setting is Phillipis in Greece, 52AD. The setting of Greece contributes to the thematic thrust of the story, which is freedom versus enslavement as Adama's master receives "a bumper purse of Roman Denarii, not even the local Greek drachmae" (56) as appreciation from the senator. The presence of the Greek local currency is an affirmation to the geographical setting of Greece stated earlier by Akhmemokhan.

Also, in "Fresh Fish", the setting is south-south Nigeria, 2020AD. She uses characters' names like 'Odion' and pastor 'Mena' to depict the authenticity of the stated location. The background of this story is the truth that some people that are least expected to make heaven will make it, which is seen in Luke 13. The story is narrated from the third-person narrative point of view with Shalom as the central consciousness.

Akhmemokhan uses flashback to give a clearer picture on why Bassey is frustrated after Shalom's encounter with pastor Mena. She puts;

If he hadn't known her better, at this point he would have liberated himself from her affair the way he discarded a drenched coat when he came in from a heavy downpour.... Pastor Mena had been his idea, sold to him by mind-blowing close-ups of her healing crusades on the television, and by his daughter, Joy,it has taken Joy's enthusiasm plus weeks of his knowledge.....to secure an interview with the coveted lady, and now this. "Beg de pastor. Beg dis one. Beg dat one. All na wasted saliva", Bassey thought, resentful (64).

The above excerpt shows the effort of Bassey to secure an interview with pastor Mena for Shalom. He is not happy at the outcome as Shalom does not succumb to the instructions of the 'coveted' lady, pastor Mena.

In Mamudu's "The Hostile Care-Taker" in *The Beauty of Madness and other Stories*, the setting of the story is not stated but can be clearly deduced. The story talks about the hostility of Austilo towards Steven and his wife, Deborah. Austilo is a proud

“failed footballer” (39) who has “a permanent seat on the reserve bench and nobody in the team, whether coach, manager or mate” (39) is bothered if he is there or not. The conversation between Austilo and a middle aged woman states that the setting of this story is Benin City. Austilo, after being thrown out of his one-room apartment gets a new accommodation by the woman along “Ekenwan road” (42). Although the name of the stadium where Austilo stays regularly is not stated, it can be assumed to be Samuel Ogbemudia stadium along Ekenwan road as it is the main stadium in the city of Benin. The third-person narrative point of view is employed to tell the story.

Mamudu employs the use of flashback to showcase the reason behind Austilo’s current proud nature. He writes thus;

With no gainful employment, he hung around the stadium, basking in his long lost glory. He drew everyone’s attention noisily to himself. “Who can afford to ignore Austilo? So far I am the only one who has scored five goals in one match. That is, one hat trick and a half. I beg, E no easy”. He would boast loudly (39-40).

From the excerpt above, Mamudu reveals Austilo’s achievements through his use of flashback. Though he is currently a failed footballer, he basks in his previous success. After his contract has been terminated, he gets none as “his first few utterances during interviews give his prospective handlers cause for second thoughts” (39) and therefore denying him any contract.

The story titled “The Hired Husband”, Mamudu employs the third person narrative point of view to ridicule the activities of the rich in the society and to tell a story of mistaken identity. The setting of the story is not stated. His use of characters like Nosa and Osaro gives the readers a hint on the geographical location to be Benin City. Also, he writes that Osaro boards a “taxi from Aerodrome close to Oliha market, in company of two strangers” (64), which further affirms this setting as the popular Oliha market, named after chief Oliha of Benin kingdom, is situated in Benin.

The use of flashback by Mamudu in this story is to clarify the reason for Nosa's assassination. After Nosa's murder which is a case of mistaken identity, Osaro tries to remember the incident that prompts chief Ayinke to pay "the Black Bat" (69) for his assassination. Mamudu writes;

As he waited in court that morning, Osaro still could not find any possible reason for chief Ayinke's actions. He played the entire film through his mind's eye. He had gone to work for the Ayinkes one hot afternoon as their air conditioner had broken down. Shortly after that, Mrs. Ayinke..... came in a negligee which highlighted her exotic curves. She embraced the thoroughly embarrassed technician. This was impossible, thought Osaro.. she successfully seduced Osaro and when he left for his house, he was a twenty-sitter-Toyota bus richer, a gift from the Ayinkes for his service. "Court!" bawled the court clerk. Osaro was jolted from his long reverie (66-69).

Mamudu's artistic use of flashback in this story is necessary as it serves as a backdrop to understanding the reason for Nosa, Osaro's brother's death. Nosa dies simply as a result of the striking resemblance he has with his brother who commits the crime of sleeping with the chief's wife, a woman "whose beauty is outstanding and choking" (66). The flashback helps to give a better understanding to the story which begins from the climax.

"Curriculum" in *Changing Colours* by Sophia Akhmemokhan is the only story written in the third-person omniscient point of view so as to include more than one consciousness. She takes Melody, mother of Venunye and Tabara, as the major consciousness and Rita, a clone made by Venunye to kill Melody, as the secondary consciousness. The background of this story is the bible prophecy of Ezekiel 30 that Africa will join Egypt in a war and that they will lose. Akhmemokhan gives a detailed setting of this story to be West Africa in the end time when the book of revelation will be fulfilled as children will begin to be killers of their own parents as seen in the case

of Venunye who creates a clone with his friend Chung, to kill his mother in order to take vengeance on her

Conclusion

Adekunle Mamudu and Sophia Akhuemokhan have both used the narrative techniques of setting, focalization and flashback in *The Beauty of Madness* and *Changing Colors* respectively to convey an evocative message. The settings of Akhuemokhan's stories in *Changing Colors* are stated twice in details, unlike Mamudu's stories which are deduced by characters' names or familiar places within the environment. Also, while Mamudu employs the third-person narrative point of view in all his short stories in *The Beauty of Madness and other Stories*, Akhuemokhan employs the third-person point of view, the first-person point of view and the third-person omniscient point of view.

Lastly, both writers use flashback to give their readers a clearer picture of the current happenings in a particular story

Works Cited

Akhuemokhan, Sophia. *Changing Colours*. Uniben Press, 2017. Print.

Akhuemokhan, Sophia. *Changing Colours: A Series of Short Stoies, Summaries and Analyses*. Gift Prints, 2017. Print.

Boyd, William. "A Short History of the Short Story", 2018.

Mamudu, Adekunle. *The Beauty of Madness and Other Stories*. Headmark Publishers, 1995. Print.

"Narrative Techniques in Writing: Definition, Types and Example". Study.com, 2015.

Accessed 12th June, 2021.