Catharsis from Ikemefuna's Immolation: A Study of Para-social Relationship with Fictional Character in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart.*

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ABSTRACT
Since the language of stories is a medium of literature, this study attempts to describe the emotional and psychological impacts of catharsis on readers of prose fiction. The purpose is to know how such effects of tragedy evolve a para-social relationship between the reading community and the fictional character at the instance of Ikemefuna's immolation in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Given that the linguistics and literary expectations of readers change over the course of time. The paper hence, adopted Hans Robert Jauss' Reception Theory to understand how the reading of text creates meanings. Then, the methodological direction highlighted textual analysis by priming M. A. K. Halliday's Theme-Rheme structure of mode as a textual function so as to generate coded data for the goal of thematic analysis in the study. In any case, the discussion of findings revealed among others that unmarked topical and textual themes mostly can harmonize ideational with interpersonal meanings, organize message, coherence and, even assist the success of a text from a reader's perspective. The paper therefore, concludes that our pity and fear about Ikemefuna's immolation only make us to empathize with him under the illusion of identification though such emotions are later neutralized when we realised that Ikemefuna is a fictionalized character and does not exist in real life.
Keywords: Catharsis**,** Language, Para-social Relationship, Identification, Thematic Analysis, Theme-Rheme

INTRODUCTION
Since the communication of human thoughts and feelings mostly requires language to build a sense of commonality with one's readers, it then entails that literature presupposes language of expression as any literary texts offer a rich source of linguistic input to account for the resources of meaning borne out of catharsis through an evolution of parasocial relationships. This realization underscores the inextricable connection between language and literature. Emeka J. Otagburuagu et al., lend credence to this when they assert that; the relationship between language and literature is "A close-knit one" because "language is the sole medium of literature while literature is the most sophisticated manifestation of language" (4).
In any case, catharsis is "an emotional discharge that brings about a moral or psychological renewal or welcome relief from tension and anxiety" (Oha and Uwawgbute 62). According to the Greek Philosopher Aristotle, "catharsis is the defining point and critical closure of any tragic artistic work". He writes in his *Poetics* (C. 350 BCE) that: "Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude: … through pity (*ekeos*) and fear (*phobos*) effecting the proper purgation (catharsis) of these emotions" (qtd. in Oha and Uwaegbute 62). In connection to this account, Donald Horton and Richard

Wohl first introduce the concept of parasocial relationships, along with the idea of parasocial interaction in their 1958 article "*Mass Communication and Para-social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance*". They describe that; "A parasocial relationship is always mediated and one sided with no opportunity for mutual give and take" (215). This means that it is psychologically similar to a real life social relationship which can strengthen a bond between readers and fictional characters.

A fictional character in this study is an imaginary person represented in a work of fiction. Even though, fictional characters in literary works live in the fictional realm, yet, real feelings develop in parasocial relationship between the readers and such fictional personal. That is, through a parasocial interaction, there tends to be an exposure that arouses interest in the fictional personae which becomes a parasocial relationship after repeated exposure to the media or (novelistic persona in our case), and then causes the media user or (reader) to develop illusions of intimacy through 'transportation and 'identification in which some "Researchers believe… may be related to the ability to empathize with others" (Walkington). This draws our attention to how stories shape our worldview through what the psychologists technically call assimilation, transportation and identification on the mind of the readers. Assimilation is when the reader takes on the qualities of a fictional characters or group while transportation is when the readers lose themselves in the story. Identification is where a reader has a perspective and identity of a story character. In view of this, Zoe Walkington says: "There are few things that stories do to us. As we are immersed in a story, it forms a sort of social surrogate, boosts our self-esteem and improves our mood". In the same vein, Anthony Horowitz emphasizes during an interview with BBC programme on IDEAS that:

> Reading is not a relaxation – you are building worlds, you are populating the worlds with cities you are populating with people. So although television, film and theatre all have their place in the story telling world, to me, that moment of contact with a book when you read a story and unlock its secrets … nothing quite crimes close.

It is worthy to note that one of the literary works of fiction which elicited pity and fear is *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. Though this novel was published as far back as 1958, however, it actually seems to be of the archetypal novel that still never ceased to fascinate and intrigue emerging readers of successive generations because of its prevailing discursive practice in terms of production and reception which has attracted awards, critical reviews and translations to different languages.

Actually, we the readers are introduced to the human tragedy of this novel that is full of fictional characters like Okonkwo, Ikemefuna, Nwoye, Obierika among others. Given that the ultimate tragedy in the story is the suicide of Okonkwo the protagonist, nonetheless, this study rather focuses on the poignant and gruesome immolation of a minor character in the novel called Ikemefuna. This is because, he is portrayed in the novel as "the doomed lad who was sacrificed to the village of Umuofia by their neighbours to avoid war and bloodshed. The ill-fated lad was called Ikemefuna" (6).

It is against this backdrop that this paper describes the taken-for–granted catharsis from Ikemefuna's immolation in the novel and the attendant parasocial relationship this could have been evoking emotionally in the minds of every successive generation of readers since the production and reception of *Things Fall Apart*. For this, Jonathan Culler notes that:

> More than any other literary form… or any other type of writing, the novel… is the discourse in and through which (we)… can most easily study the semiotic process in the fullest scope: (literary texts are) the creation and reorganization of (linguistic) signs… (189)

In view of this, there may be assertion that the meaning of a text does not come into being unless it is employed in a context of situation. In the words of Peter Verdonk:

> This process of activation of a text by relating it to a context of use is what we call discourse. To put it differently, this contextualization of a text is actually the reader's … reconstruction of the writer's…. intended meaning, that is, his or her

communicative act or discourse. In these terms, the text is the observable product of the writers… discourse. (18)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.
This paper is focused on Reception Theory as a version of Reader Response Criticism that emphasizes the reader's reception of a literary text. Usually, a text is an artifact that stimulates meaning. In literature, reception theory emanated from the insight of Hans Robert Jauss in his *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982). Given that the linguistic and literary expectation of readers change over the course of time, and considering the assumption that readers and critics have access to the texts as well as its criticisms, there develops an evolving historical tradition of interpretations and evaluations of a given literary work. Jauss refers to this traditional as a continuous dialectic between the text and the horizon of successive readers; the literary text in itself, possesses no inherent meaning or value.

This attention to the reading process, in the view of Lois Tyson originated during the 1930s as a reaction against the growing tendency to reject the reader's role in creating meaning, a tendency that became a formal principle of the New Criticism which dominated critical practice in the 1940s and 1950s. From the foregoing, reception theorists share beliefs that the role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature and that readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text.

Kelly Griffith in *Writing Essays about Literature* contends that "reader – response criticism is a school of criticism which maintains that readers actually contribute to the meaning of works of literature" (1). Here, there is the belief that the text is incomplete until it is read. To the critics: Context (including historical, biographical, cultural, psychoanalytic) is relevant to the understanding of the text. Texts may be incomplete in themselves but the reading of them makes them potentially reflective of the real world – or at least the reader's experience of the real world. Scholars like the German critic Wolfgang Iser concurs with Jacques Derrida that works contain "gaps" which must be filled. Iser argues, therefore, that "many equally valid interpretations of a work are possible" (3). This is as the American Stanley Fish states that "reader's understanding of what literature is" and "what works of literature mean" is formed by "interpretative communities" (2). That is, the groups to which readers belong.

However, the reader-response has been initially criticized as being overly impressionistic and guilty of the affective fallacy. That is, focused on the emotional effect of the work. Other detractors have openly accused that the theory is not intellectual. Consequently, these attacks have led to the adaption of the variant known as reception theory. Even at that, the theorists' claim according to Jim Loter in (Bennett 3) that "The phenomenon of varied readings and the existence of contingent contexts then, are perceived as ontological and epistemological problems which require a theoretical method in order to for one to perform critical functions". In short the inability of readers not to agree on a single, non-contradictory interpretation of any given text suggests to many reception theories that (i) texts have no meaning, and meaning is produced by the reader through the interaction of him or her and the text.

Whatever be the case, the use of reception theory in this study is relevant to our objective because this theory is amenable to the human emotional sensibilities of tragedy which are triggered as a result of negotiated readings of literary work that lead to the psychological momentum of parasocial relationships between the readers and the fictional characters.

RESEARCH METHOD
The research method adopted for this paper is textual analysis to describe the structure of the text as the researchers sought to connect Thematic Analysis from the insight of Kimberly Neuendorf with M. A. K. Halliday's Theme-Rheme structure of mode under the semiotic function of language. This was done to reveal how catharsis evolves a parasocial relationship between readers and the fictional character Ikemefuna. Neuendorf writes that thematic analysis "assumes that the recorded messages themselves (i.e. the texts) are the data, and codes are developed by the investigator during close examination of the texts as salient themes emerge inductively from the texts" (211) while Halliday defines mode as "the symbolic

organization of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel and also the rhetorical mode" (12).

Specifically, the sentences in chapter seven of *Things Fall Apart* were selected and numbered as codes of manifest contents for ease of reference in order to give our text reducing data collection a small quantitative status apart from its qualitative focus. This is because Uwe Flick calls for "a triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative research where each approach follows its own method approach criteria" (175).

From the foregoing, Robert Weber notes that "to make valid inferences from the text, it is important that the classification procedure be reliable in the sense of being consistent" (12). Thus, this study used the manifest content which usually involves words, sentences, and paragraphs of the literary text rather than their meanings for the purpose of generating numerical data through frequency to support its qualitative objective. This can be shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Manifest Content of the Literary Text

Words	Sentences	Paragraphs
Chapter seven of Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe		
2990	178	28

Sources: *Basic Content Analysis* (Weber 18) and *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 37 – 43).

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The focus of our data analysis in this study was based on the already established procedures of textual analysis used to infer both inductive and deductive designs of coded data while constructing the theme-rheme structure of mode. The purpose is to describe the thematic analysis of Ikemefuna's immolation and its purgative effects on the readers.

For this reason, the theme-rheme is the realisation of mode at the lexico-grammatical level of the text. In this structure, Halliday and Hassan define theme as "the element which serves as the point of departure of the message" where as "the part in which the theme is developed, is called the rheme" (64). For them, the structure can be classified as: Unmarked topical (Antecedent subject of the sentence), Marked topical (Adverbial, Prepositional or Complement elements before the subject), Textual (Conjunctive or continuative element before the subject), and Interpersonal (Evocative, modality, finite verb operator or WH/polar interrogative elements before the subject) themes. Therefore, the theme-rheme structure of mode in chapter seven of the novel is indicated with its frequency and percentage in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Theme-Rheme Structure of Mode in the Literary Text

Unmarked Topical Theme	Marked Topical Theme	Textual Theme	Interpersonal Theme
Chapter Seven of *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe			
He grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season, and was full of the sap of life [2]; [3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 24, 25, 32, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 51, 52, 54, 57, 58, 61, 62, 63, 65, 69, 70, 71, 72, 75, 77, 79, 80, 82, 84, 86, 88, 89, 91, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 103, 104, 105, 106, 108, 109, 111, 112, 114, 11, 116, 117, 118, 119, 123, 124, 125, 128, 130, 132, 134, 135, 137, 139, 143, 144,145,147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 156, 159, 160]; He heard Ikemefuna cry, 'my father, they have killed me me!' as he ran towards him [161]; [163, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176]; It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father walked in, that night after killing Ikemefuna [178].	For three years Ikemefuna lived in Okonkwos household and the elders of Umuofia seemed to have forgotten about him [1]; [7, 13, 15, 29, 33, 53, 56, 59, 67, 74, 100, 101, 113, 140, 141]; As soon as his father walked knew that Ikemefuna had been killed, and something seemed to give way inside him like the snapping of a tightened bow [164].	And so he was always happy when be heard him grumbling about women [11]; [18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 34, 38, 48, 50, 55, 60, 64, 66, 68, 73, 81, 87, 90, 97, 102, 107, 110, 120, 121, 122, 126, 133, 136, 136, 157, 158]; Dazed with fear Okonkwo drew his matchet and cut him down [162]; [170]; Then something had given way inside him [177].	Do not bear hand in his death [76]; 'Yes Umuafia has decided to kill him [78]; [127, 129, 131, 138, 142]; Why had Okonkwo withdrawn to the rear?' [155].

Source: *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (Halliday 12).

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage of Mode (Textual Function).

Theme-Rheme Structure	Frequency	Percent (%)
Unmarked Topical Theme (UTT)	108	61%
Marked Topical Theme (MTT)	21	12%
Textual Theme (TT)	41	23%
Interpersonal Theme (IT)	08	05%
Total	178	100%

From the two Tables above, we have to infer a narrating persona and this we could only be based on the internal evidence of the text itself. This is because the meaning of our target text did not come into being until it was actively adapted to the context of use. This, we considered the chapter seven of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* with the sentences numbered for ease of reference.

Here we the readers can cognitively follow "The detached yet tolerant tone of the…" (Carroll 33) narrative voice expressing a subjective tragic perspective which gives a distressing view of Ikemefuna's fate under the Marked Topical Theme (MTT): "For three years, Ikemefuna lived in Okonkwo's household and the elders of Umuofia seemed to have forgotten him" [1]. As this continues under the Unmarked

Topical Theme (UTT): "He grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season, and was full of the sap of life" [2]. However, the unfortunate irony in the story is revealed under the Interpersonal Theme (IT): "Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him" [78] as UTT buttresses it: "The oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it" [79]: "They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom and kill him there" [30]. The decision to sacrifice Ikemefuna is pathetically evoked by Okonkwo's second wife and Nwoye's mother as soon as her son tells her about Ikemefuna's journey under UTT that: "She immediately dropped the pestle with which she was grinding pepper, folded her arms across her breast and sighed, 'Poor child' [93]. Meanwhile, the lie that he Ikemefuna will be returned back to Mbaino, his parental country of birth gives him ominous feeling under Textual Theme (TT): "As for Ikemefuna he was at loss" [87]. This is indeed, the suspense that grips him in the course of the journey under UTT to the point that: "Ikemefuna looked back, and the man growled at him to go and not stand looking back" [152]. But: "The way he said it sent cold fear down Ikemefuna's back" [153]; "His hands trembled vaguely on the black pot he carried" [154] and even; "Ikemefuna felt his legs melting under him" [165]; "And he was afraid to look back" [157]. Before then, Ikemefuna wonders rhetorically under IT: 'Why had Okonkwo withdrawn to the rear? [155].

Finally, Ikemefuna's tragedy is resolved first under UTT while Okonkwo goes against the earlier advice of Ogbuefi Ezeudu but makes a decisive response in order to suppress his weakness after: "He heard Ikemefuna cry, 'my father, they have killed me!' as he ran towards him" [161]. Indeed, this is followed under TT with the violent action of Okonkwo on Ikemefuna as in: "Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his matchet and cut him down" [162]. But this unwholesome emotion of childhood immolation is broodingly affected by Okonkwo's son Nwoye who happens to be Ikemefuna's alter ego. For him under MTT: "As soon as his father walked in, that night, Nwoye knew that Ikemefuna had been killed, and something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow" [164].

This presupposes a childhood trauma for Nwoye to the extent that he encounters morbid flashbacks through the narrative under UTT as: "It was after such a day at the farm during the last harvest that Nwoye had felt for the first time a snapping inside him like the one he now felt" [172]; "They were returning home with baskets of yams from a distant farm across the stream when they had heard the voice of an infant crying in the thick forest" [173]; "A sudden hush had fallen on the women, who had been talking, and they had quickened their steps" [174]; "Nwoye had heard, that twins were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest, but he had never yet come across them" [175]; "A vague chill had descended on him and his head had seemed to swell, like a solitary walker at night who passes an evil spirit on the way" [176]. Yet, it is TT that emphasizes the point with: "Then something had given way inside him" [177] given that UTT concludes that stream of consciousness as: "It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father walked in, that night after killing Ikemefuna" [178]. However, it is worthy to note that the readers might have this sense of recovery at the end of the narrative after realizing that the story is just a fictional account.

CONCLUSION

From the details of this research, it can be assumed that literature shapes the language of stories that we do read of in order to contextualize thematic meanings of texts which cognitively may imply parasocial relationships between the reading community and the fictional characters. As far as the insights of Reception Theory could go, a text stimulates meaning through reading as the goal is potentially reflective of the reader's experience of the real world. Hence, the motivation for reading about the tragic role of Ikemefuna in *Things Fall Apart* was evident from this study as Neuendorf's proposition of Thematic Analysis to this text was also assisted by Halliday's Theme-Rheme structure of mode of discourse as textual metafunction. This was able to reveal that the Unmarked Topical Theme and Textual Theme prominently accounted for the higher frequencies and percentages of 108/61% and 41/23% respectively. By presupposition, these thematic choices among others have helped to integrate the ideational with interpersonal meanings. That is, in order to give a special status to a chosen part of a clause as well as contribute to the coherence; organize the message; and plays a discoursal role in the success of this text from a reader's perspective. On the whole, this outcome suggests the assumption that the past and even

the on-going readers may have the emotional and psychological tendencies of transportation and identification given a different reader-response pattern. As all readers do not experience the same kind of catharsis to the same degree, nonetheless, it is still a universal experience because our pity and fear are excited since Ikemefuna the sufferer is parasocially related to us. And by so doing, we the readers may have this lucid recovery from our sense of suspended identification as our pity and fear are neutralized after we realised that the story is constructed by the author to mean that Ikemefuna is unlike us and that we spend our emotions on him and not on ourselves.

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