



Research Paper

Proverbs in The Embellishment of The African Novel: An Analysis of Onyeka Ike's *The Great Harvest*

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a reflection of life, particularly the lives of the people from where it emanates. This Integral relationship between literature and its context is decipherable through the culture of the people and this includes their linguistic expressions. Within the African context, particularly the Igbo community of Eastern Nigeria, language is deployed artistically in every day conversation in order to deepen comprehension, retain ideas, and enhance beauty of expression. Within this community, the technicalities deployed in the embellishment of spoken language are rooted in their oral literary tradition and they include proverbs, idioms, riddles tongue twisters, fables and myths. This study is concerned with the identification, and consideration of contextual relevance of proverbs found in *The Great Harvest* by Onyeka Ike. Like his predecessor and namesake, Chukwuemeka Ike of blessed memory, Onyeka Ike draws extensively from African proverbs in order to effectively convey his subject matter in *The Great Harvest*. This paper seeks to uncover the didactic values in the use of proverbs in the African novel with *The Great Harvest* as well as ascertain that the African novel embodies traits of the societies that have produced it and also serves as documents of preservation of the people's nuance and culture. Using the New Historicism theoretical paradigm as well as the qualitative research methodology, this study throws more light on the general concept of proverbs, while establishing that Onyeka Ike and indeed, many notable African novelists engage their creativities in the propagation and preservation of their primordial linguistic and socio-cultural values.

Keywords: Culture, Language, Proverbs, Conversation, The African Novel

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I. INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are concise and wise saying with didactic values. Proverbs in Africa are deeply rooted in oral tradition and they reflect the thoughts and insights of the people from where they emanate. Prior to the advent of literacy in Africa, proverbs were in oral form and passed from generation to generation. Whether in its written or oral form, Proverbs in Africa were carried in conversation, admonition and in encouragement of those to whom they are addressed. Finnegan (1976:391) confirms the implication and important pride of place of proverbs in the life of Africans when she declares that "Proverbs occur almost everywhere in Africa in apparent contrast in other areas of the world such as aboriginal America and Polynesia." Proverbs are rich in imagery which are rooted in the culture of the people and are used to drive home some points in the course of conversation. In many African cultures, "a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs" (Finnegan:1976, 390). Chukwuma (1994:7) affirms that proverbs enjoy more attention by researchers and communicators due to its brevity as compared to myths and tales. It is this brevity while retaining its beauty that drives many African novelists to incorporate proverbs with imageries of African world view and heritage in their creativities. For instance, Achebe explains the relevance of proverbs in *Things fall Apart*, (1958: 4), when he declares that "Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten". Here, Achebe attempts to draw readers' attention to the ornamental beauty of proverbs, known as *INU* in Igbo language. He engages the imagery of a popular sumptuous delicacy of yam and palm oil which is popular among the Igbos. Thus, a proverb is a linguistic phenomenon used in the embellishment of ideas during conversation; it exists in context and, makes its own situations. On his part, Chukwuemeka Ike also

draws extensively from his Igbo heritage of proverbs in most of his novels. For instance, *Chicken Chasers* (1980) is replete with many proverbs which encapsulate a variety of flora and fauna of Igbo world view. These include “when a monkey sets off on a venture, it cannot afford to look back” (p. 18); a chicken does not pitch battle with a hawk” (p. 85); “the slave who smiles unconcerned when his fellow slave is being buried alive will face a similar experience someday” (p. 88). *Our Children are Coming* (1990) also contains numerous proverbs which are related to the need for proper upbringing of the African child and they include “the training you give a puppy determines how it behaves as an adult dog” (24); it is from the parent snake that the baby snake inherits its venom” (24). Chukwuemeka Ike deploys these proverbs in order to drive home his point on issues of hard work, compassion for others and the need for proper training of future leaders of his Nigerian nation (Anyanwu, 2016). In tandem with his forerunners in the art of incorporating proverbs in the novel in Africa, Onyeka Ike extensively deploys the use of proverbs in *The Great Harvest*.

Published in 2020 and set in Nenwe, a community in sync with Igbo socio cultural world view, *The Great Harvest* encapsulates many proverbs with imageries drawn from the everyday realities of the flora and fauna of the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria. The novel vividly captures the everyday lives of the people in Nenwe community. This traditional community is yet to experience modern civilization despite the nation’s claim to independence. Thus, Nenwe lacks modern amenities of life, including electricity, clean water and super highways. Hard working, skilled in farming, and trading, the people of this primordial community are deeply rooted in Igbo culture and social tradition including the use of proverbs in their everyday conversations. The people of Nenwe deploy proverbs to drive home their point, present the truth, enhance easy comprehension of issues, advice younger generation and create beauty for aesthetic delight. Like Chinua Achebe, and Chukwuemeka Ike, Onyeka Ike deploys extensive use of proverbs which are also apt, concise and rich in imageries of animals, plants and common abstract ideas. This study examines the use of proverbs in Ike’s *The Great Harvest* in order not only to contribute to scarce critical works on the text, but also to enhance a better understanding of the text.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Proverbs in literary scholarship convey cultural values and norms of the people from where it emanates. Its engagements within this artistic terrain helps readers to better understand the cultural and social contexts in which the stories are set as well as engender a deeper comprehension of the subject matter and the overall message of the story. Within the African context, many studies have been undertaken on the implication and relevance of proverbs in every day conversation. In other words, Proverbs mean different things to different people. To Finnegan, it is characterized majorly by its ‘shortness’ and ‘poetic’ quality. She thus defines it as “a saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense, salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it” (Finnegan, 393). To Chukwuma (1994: 28), *inu*, which is translated to proverbs in Igbo “is a short prose form which consists of a unit of speech utterance that is true, valid, and popular ... proverbs carry a prestigious symbol of wisdom and verbal sophistication”. She further attests to the anonymity of the origin of proverbs in Igbo culture “Inu is of anonymous creation and is used orally and transmitted orally unself-consciously” (p.29).

on his part, Akporobaro (2004:78) identifies the role of Proverbs in the linguistic expression of a people when he declares that “Proverbs are to portray for people their way of living, their criticism of life, their moral truth and social values.” Osakue and Inegbeboh (2013:20) affirm that proverbs in Southern Nigeria “exploit the resources of metaphor, hyperbole, similes, among other striking artistic forms”. Proverbs have graphic qualities with which they spice speech. Jegede (2008:182) perceives proverbs as “a dynamic mode of discourse with unique identity ...” He further identifies its usefulness in the process of effective communication in different disciplines and spheres of interaction when he declares that “Proverbs form a pool of linguistic and thematic resources from which speakers and writers in rhetoric, politics, economics, jurisprudence, philosophy, history, religion and technology draw inspiration (2011:35). Alagoa (1968:235) views proverbs from its experiential and historical perspectives when he declares that “proverbs are pithy sayings of the wise, which embody personal and general historical experience.” The wisdom in proverb usage lies in its artistic component, as well as its contextual appropriateness. As products of their respective environments, African novelists engage in extensive use of proverbs in their art. Through this style, they are able to reflect their culture as well as natural environment. This study therefore intends to identify proverbs in Onyeka Ike’s *The Great Harvest* as well as examine their contextual appropriateness in the communication process. But before we delve substantially into the analysis of proverbs in the text, it is expedient to consider the theoretical paradigm which shall guide the direction of our argument in this study.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts the New Historicism theoretical paradigm. Coined and pioneered by Stephen Greenblatt, especially in his work entitled *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (1982), New Historicism as a theoretical framework seeks to understand literary texts within the cultural, historical and social contexts in which they were produced. It also seeks to explore how literary texts both reflect and shape the cultural and ideological values of the author's time. Like Hippolyte Taine who acknowledges the importance of author's race, milieu and moment, proponents of this theory argue that, the author's present time and cultural background are to be considered when evaluating a work of literature because they have an impact on the way and things the author writes about in his work. Other champions of New Historicism include Michel Foucault, Louis Montrose and Catherine Gallagher. In their various respective studies, these scholars emphasize the importance of considering not only the literary elements of a work, but also the historical and cultural contexts in which it was produced and received. Through this approach, one can gain greater insights into the ways in which works of literature reflect the society from which they emanate. In tandem with the arguments of new Historicists, Onyeka Ike's *The Great Harvest* reflect numerous aspects of culture, everyday life and world view of Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria which forms the setting of the novel.

Greenblatt's studies have opened up new avenues for understanding and reading literature. Furthermore, it has demonstrated the interconnectedness of literature and society and the importance of readings that take into account flora, Fauna the entire environment from which the author emerges. It is therefore expedient that we consider the biography and cultural background of the author of *The Great Harvest* Onyeka Joseph Ike.

IV. AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Onyeka Ike, is a Nigerian writer from Enugu state of South Eastern Nigeria. He was born on 15th July, 1978. He holds a bachelor of science degree in Applied Biochemistry from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. A Bachelor of Arts in English and Literary Studies from Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa, a PGDE, M. A and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in English Studies from the University of Port Harcourt. He has written and published several novels including *The Great Harvest* which was published in 2020. His other works include *The Dangers of It Doesn't Matter* (2003), *The Secret Ordinances* (2003), *The Dance of Destiny* (2005), *The Story of My Life* (2007), *Shackles of Freedom* (2018). He is currently a lecturer in the Department of English and Communication Studies in Federal University Otuoke, in Bayelsa State of Nigeria.

V. SYNOPSIS OF TEXT

Set in Nenwe, a fictional Hamlet in Eastern Nigeria, *The Great Harvest* is narrated by an omniscient child narrator named Ochemba. The novel encapsulates multifaceted themes which cut across various aspects of life of the Igbo people, including themes of family, conflict resolution, love, farming, food, festivals, flora and fauna and extensive deployment of Igbo cultural lifestyle. These include peculiar communication pattern including code mixing and code switching between the English and Igbo languages, rituals, festivals, extensive deployment of proverbs, conflict resolution, folklore, and information dissemination patterns which are typical of the Igbo People of Eastern Nigeria.

The narrative begins with an invasion of monkeys from Ofiali forest in Ochemba's homestead. Ochemba's parents and older siblings are not around and therefore leave Ochemba as the man of the house with his little sister, Ify. Not even Mmereoma is around to defend them from the monkeys. Ochemba tries his best to chase the monkeys away and defend the home with a blunt cutlass but the monkeys proved stubborn and wreak havoc on the crops in the family compound. The monkeys, on seeing mama and Mmereoma (the family pet dog) take flight to their abode leaving Mmereoma to anger. Mama questions Ochemba's masculinity in failing to deal with the monkeys.

As the narrative progresses, we observe the communal life style of the people of Nenwe as well as the role of animals in the lives of the people. In this community, animals serve as both domestic pets and companions as well as means of protein sourced through aggressive hunting and trap setting in the wild. Mama is one major character through which we get revelations, through her constant telling of stories of past events to her children. For instance, she tells Ochemba of the origin of the four hamlets in their town. According to her each is populated by each of the four sons of Mazi Joku Onwe who was the greatest hunter of his generation and the founder of Nenwe, their hamlet.

It goes on to tell us of amarvia, tooth disease and how Ochemba suffered it till he performed the amarvia ritual dance. The novel also describes the home routine of the family, equally mentioning the family's pets namely Mmereoma and the pussycat to show that they are part of the family, even to the extent of mama intervening in Mmereoma's love life. This indicates the closeness and value put on the domestic animals. Animals in the hamlet are also used for rituals or during festivals. This is the case with Mmereoma's first lover, the beast (dog) was used for the agwu nwonkoro sacrifice. Mama prefers it to Mmereoma's current lover which she dislikes and always goes after whenever it comes to visit Mmereoma. There is also the portrayal of the

involvement of the gods in the affairs of the people. According to Mama's narrative, Ngene is the most dreaded and greatest oracle in the land. People use its symbol for swearing and when found guilty, the person dies within twelve days. She tells of how Ngene became a God in Nenwe. The gods have a great role to play in the lives of the people as they always acknowledge the existence of the gods and links ills that befall anyone to the workings of the gods in the land.

As the narrative progresses, the reader's attention is drawn to the wise men and their wits in action and linguistic expression in the hamlet. The likes of Anyanwu and Ekwesu play active roles in conflict resolution among members of the community through their wisdom expressed by their choices of words and proverbs in the expression of their perception of every occasion. An instance of this is seen in the settlement between a couple, Ifebunandu, the daughter of Ukpata and Nzube. Nzube accuses Ifebunandu of cheating on him with another man and brings the case before the elders of the land for resolution. Through this case, the elders proved to the younger generation that they are indeed endowed with experience and wisdom of expression. (282).

Furthermore, the communal lifestyle of the people is not left in the narrative. The members of Nenwe and nearby communities always show up for each other when the need arises. This idea is portrayed when Okafor, Ekwesu and four others accompany papa and his family for *The Great Harvest* at Ogbofu farmland. The yams are many and of big sizes. This great harvest of bountiful yams earns papa the coveted "Okoji" title. This rare title is usually conferred on great yam farmers in the land, for they refer to yam as the "king of plants" in the hamlet. The story concludes with Papa's "Okoji" title celebration which brings together many people, both from Nenwe and outside of Nenwe as is customary at an occasion like this. (330). Our interest in this study is to identify the deployment of proverbs and their appropriateness of context of its usage in the novel.

Every sphere of life of the people in this primordial community is wrapped in different forms of linguistic expression and as earlier mentioned, these include the use of proverbs to drive home points during conversations. The narrative contains many proverbs and its identification is the major preoccupation of this study. This is with the aim of establishing the distinctive role of proverbs in the embellishment of the African novel with Onyeka Ike's *The Great Harvest* as a typical example.

VI. LIST AND ANALYSIS OF SELECTED PROVERBS IN *THE GREAT HARVEST*

In *The Great Harvest*, Onyeka Ike deploys an extensive use of proverbs in bringing out the beauty and wisdom in the linguistic expression of his Igbo language. In the narrative, proverbs are majorly deployed by elders like Anyanwu who is the arch priest of Ngelokwe deity. Others are Papa, Ndunta, Okafor, Okorie, Okonta and Ekwesu. These characters resort to proverbs in their speech to relate to situations and teach morals to the younger ones in the novel. Interestingly, wisdom and experiences of these elders are embedded in the proverbs they deploy during conversations. Some of the proverbs identified in the novel are as follows:

- A. "What an elder see while sitting down, a child cannot see it even if he climbs on top of the mountain " (p. 111, line 18).
- B " He used his own hands and killed himself " (p. 112, line 15).
- C. " It is the man with palm leaves that a goat follows " (112, line 19).
- D. " A child's palm does not get scalded by a piece of boiled yam his mother put in his palm " (118, line 31
- E. " If you abandon life and pursue wealth, an enemy will enjoy the wealth " (158, line 13).
- F. " That which killed a dog must be strong " (171, line 27).
- G. " Hunger is a great enemy to mankind " (171, line 28).
- H. " You cannot identify a white chicken in an already boiling pot of soup " (198, line 15).
- I. " Whoever did not do a smelly thing would not smell his hand " (283, line 28).
- J. "Feaces does not get smelly while still in the belly " (280).
- K. "A snake that is seen by only one person can turn into a huge python " (280).
- L. "The grasshopper eaten by a hornbill is deaf " (281, line 6).
- M. "He who shakes a tree shakes himself " (285, line 10).
- N. "When you gossip about dirty teeth, the grass cutter listens " (287, line 9).
- O. "The dog you do not feed cannot listen to you " (287, line 12).
- P "When you see that the shadow of a tree is bent, try to straighten the tree and not the shadow " (287, line 14 - 15).
- Q. "A woman who decides to wrestle with a man cannot at the same time be conscious of concealing her private part " (287, line 20).
- R. "A woman who knows that her anus is small does not swallow an apple seed " (285, line 16).
- S. "All dogs eat excreta, but it is the one that has it on his whiskers that we can say really eats it " (285, line 18).
- T "A good tree does not bear a bad fruit " (289, line 2).
- U. "A man who wants what is on the ground must first bend down" (330).
- V. "It is the birth of new heroes that keeps old heroes alive " (330).

VII. INTERPRETATION AND CONTEXTUAL USAGE OF SELECTED PROVERBS IN THE GREAT HARVEST

As with all proverbs, the surface meaning is not necessarily an indication of the scope of its proper application. They are not necessarily restricted to their surface meaning. Proverbs are randomly a collection of maxims that reflect or touch all areas of life. The larger context can be difficult to use for interpreting proverbs, however, the context is not completely left out as they are either connected by a theme, catchword, or similar sounding words. Therefore, in interpreting a proverb, one needs not only the proverbs themselves, but also the insight that allows one to know the situation to which each proverb applies.

A. "What an elder see while sitting down, a child cannot see it even if he climbs on top of the mountain". This proverb implies that age and experience bring about wisdom, knowledge and insight that cannot be easily understood by the younger generation no matter how hard they try because of their limited experience.

Contextual Usage: Papa deploys this proverb while telling his children the story of Mbeze and Ulomma. He uses it to emphasize that the younger ones should learn to heed the good counsel and advice of their parents and elders who have seen and lived life more than them.

B. "He used his own hands and killed himself". This proverb means to bring harm upon oneself through one's own actions.

Contextual usage: In context, Papa tells the story of the illicit affair between Mbeze and Uloma to his children in order to educate them on the ill fate awaiting those who sleep with their blood relations. According to the laws of Nenwe land, "a man is not supposed to see the nakedness of a woman of the same blood with him for any reason whatsoever." (112) Mbeze knew this law and still proceeded to break it. Thus, together with Uloma, they are both banished forever from their community.

C. "It is the man with palm leaves that a goat follows". This proverb means that people with wealth, power, or influence often attract followers or imitators. It represents the idea of people being drawn to those who appear successful or important.

Contextual usage: Papa engages this proverb while responding to the story of Mbeze and Ulomma in order to inculcate the need for hard work and success into his children. In other words, Papa attempts to inform his children that the world has no place for failure and unsuccessful people. Imageries of the goat and palm leaves paint the picture of successful people and those who flock to them for assistance.

D. "A child's palm does not get scalded by a piece of boiled yam his mother put in his palm". This proverb conveys the idea that mothers have a natural instinct to shield and protect their children from harm and will go to any length to protect them. It indicates a harmless situation where the yam is not hot enough to burn the child's palm because the mother has taken precaution to make sure it does not hurt the child by blowing it before putting it in the child's palm.

Contextual usage: This proverb was used when Papa and the rest of the men were about going for the harvest at Obgofu farmland. They offered kola nuts to the gods and acknowledged how protective the gods are towards them. The imagery of the protective love of the gods for humans is compared to the love of mothers for their children.

E. "If you abandon life and pursue wealth, an enemy will enjoy the wealth". The proverb implies that, if someone prioritizes material success and wealth above everything else, they may end up losing both their happiness and their possessions to their adversaries.

Contextual usage: Okafor stated this proverb in his story of the man who married a large bottomed woman, which his father told him. He is propelled to tell this story because of the fight between Mmereoma and the black beast on their way to Obgofu farmland. He uses this story to warn men on the need not to place absolute trust in women and also not to stake their lives for material wealth.

F. "That which killed a dog must be strong". This proverb portends strength and resilience comparable to that of dogs which are strong companions of hunters in the forest. It is believed that dogs have enough strength to withstand any wild beast. While on hunting expeditions, dogs are not easily wounded or killed by wild animals. It is assumed that any animal powerful enough to kill a dog, possesses considerable strength.

Contextual usage: Okoli uses this proverb when Ochemba was tired on their way for the harvest. He used this proverb to indicate that to be able to do great things, one must possess great strength to take him down to his destination of success.

G. "Hunger is a great enemy to mankind". The proverb means that hunger is not only a physical affliction but also a deep - rooted problem that affects various aspects of human life. People can do a lot of dreaded things, including stealing and prostitution when they are hungry. Hunger affects areas such as social and economic performance in the society.

Contextual usage: Okoli also used this proverb to emphasize on the importance of food in the life of all mankind.

H. "You cannot identify a white chicken in an already boiling pot of soup". It means that, it is difficult to identify or distinguish specific characteristics in a chaotic situation.

Contextual usage: Ekwezu deploys this proverb to create a picture of the difficulty in identification of individual

roles in times of trouble or chaos. This proverb is brought about as a result of their discourse on Nigerian independence and the eventual war that ensued.

I. "Whoever did not do a smelly thing would not smell his hand". This proverb implies that an innocent conscience needs not fear accusation or condemnation.

Contextual usage: Ifebunandu, Nzube's wife was the one who stated this proverb in the midst of the council of elders during their marital crisis resolution by the elders. She used it to imply that Nzube is actually being punished for his actions towards her.

J. "Feaces does not get smelly while still in the belly". This proverb means that negative consequences or problems may not be immediately be noticeable until they are out in the open.

Contextual usage: Anyanwu used this proverb while he was addressing the elders when they gathered to settle Nzube and Ifebunandu's quarrel. He deploys this proverb in order to encourage both parties to bare their minds on issues on their marital crisis.

K. "A snake that is seen by only one person can turn into a huge python". The interpretation of this proverb is that people tend to exaggerate situations when there are no other witnesses around. It also portends the dangers of a single story. Stories are better understood when there are two or more perspectives to them.

Contextual usage: Anyanwu who is the priest of Ngelokwe deity uses this proverb in the same context of addressing the elders in judging the marital crises between Nzube and his wife.

L. "The grasshopper eaten by a hornbill is deaf". This proverb means that a person who dies even after being warned is stubborn and did not listen to warning.

M. "He who shakes a tree shakes himself". The proverb "he who shakes a tree shakes himself" means that when someone deliberately causes trouble or harm for others, they usually end up harming themselves in the process. It suggests that actions have consequences and that one cannot escape the repercussions of their own actions. By attempting to disrupt or disturb someone else's peace or well-being, the instigator ultimately brings trouble upon themselves.

Contextual usage: Ekwesu used this proverb to mean that the conflict before them is something that concerns them as a community too, then to Nzube, that if he is fighting his wife, he is as well fighting himself because they are now one: husband and wife.

N. "When you gossip about dirty teeth, the grass cutter listens". This proverb means that, when you think no one is paying attention, someone might be listening to what you are saying. It suggests that gossip and negative talks can spread easily and reach unexpected ears.

Contextual usage: Okonta gives this proverb when he tells the story of what happened to his grandfather's younger brother in the cause of settling the case between Nzube and Ifebunandu. He deploys it to caution Nzube to know how to talk to his wife in quarrelling situations.

O. "The dog you do not feed cannot listen to you". This proverb means that if you neglect or fail to provide care and attention to something or someone, they are unlikely to follow your instructions or be obedient to you.

Contextual usage: Ekwesu used this proverb to emphasize on Nzube's commitment towards his wife as the head of the family.

P. "When you see that the shadow of a tree is bent, try to straighten the tree and not the shadow". This proverb is metaphorical. It means that people should address the root cause of a challenges rather than merely addressing the symptoms or consequences.

Contextual usage: Okonta used this proverb to draw attention to the importance of identifying and working on the root cause of a problem for a more effective and lasting solution.

Q. "A woman who wrestles with a man cannot at the same time be conscious of concealing her private part." The interpretation is that, a woman who engages in a physical or confrontational activity with a man cannot at the same time maintain her modesty or privacy.

Contextual usage: This proverb is used to warn Ifebunandu not to compromise her traditional modesty or reputation by challenging her husband Nzube to a fight.

R. "A woman who knows that her anus is small does not swallow an apple seed". This is a Korean proverb that means, a woman who is aware of her limitations and weaknesses would not take unnecessary risk or engage in activities that could lead to harm.

Contextual usage: Okonta made this proverb to warn Ifebunandu concerning her aggressive actions towards her husband Nzube.

S. "All dogs eat excreta, but it is the one that has it on his whiskers that we can say really eats it". The proverb means that, there are people who have information and opinions about an issue, but it is the person who have a personal experience or that is directly involved that truly knows the issue at hand.

Contextual usage: it was used to advise Nzube of the importance of experience in actually understanding a certain situation. Therefore, he should relate with his wife as her husband and know how to tackle their conflict since he is involved in the experience himself.

T. "A good tree does not bear a bad fruit". This proverb implies that, a person who possesses good qualities,

virtues, or principles will not produce anything harmful or negative. It suggests that one's actions and character traits are directly reflected in the outcomes they produce. That a person's actions depict its nature.

Contextual usage: Anyanwu uses this proverb to encourage both Nzube and Ifebunandu of their good background and upbringing, and advises them to live up to their good home training in their marriage as husband and wife.

U. "A man who wants what is on the ground must first bend down". This proverb implies that, if someone wants something that is within their reach, they must be willing to make the effort to attain it. It implies that one cannot obtain something without putting in the necessary effort.

Contextual usage: Papa uses this proverb in addressing the people who gather to hear his pronouncement of his intention to take on the "Okoji" title. He uses it to indicate that he has put in effort to achieve this title through his farming.

V. "It is the birth of new heroes that keep old heroes alive". The proverb implies that the existence and impact of older heroes can only be appreciated and preserved if the younger heroes step up to continue in the older heroes' legacy.

Contextual usage: Papa also uses this proverb in this context, he used it to imply that he has continued in his family's legacy as great yam farmers, as we are informed that his great grandfather was a great yam farmer who also held the "Okoji" title (p. 106).

VIII. CONCLUSION

Proverbs reflect the thoughts and insights of the people from where they emanate. They have been an integral part of African literature due to their versatility, simplicity, and ability to convey cultural, moral and ethical values. Proverbs have been used widely across different genres of African literature to convey messages and values to readers. Whether it is a novel, play, or poem, writers have used this literary device to express their ideas as well as to provide insights into their respective cultures and societies.

Notable African novelists have extensively deployed proverbs in their texts in order to engender beauty of expression, effectively convey their subject matter, as well as project and preserve their culture and general world view. These novelists include Chinua Achebe, Chukwuemeka Ike and Onyeka Ike. In *The Great Harvest*, Onyeka Ike deploys proverbs which encapsulate imageries of the world view of people of Nenwe which is a fictional Igbo community in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. Anchored on the New Historicist theoretical framework, we have argued that the effective deployment of proverbs within the appropriate context in everyday conversation does not only enhance deeper understanding of the message of the literary text, but also serves as a way of documenting and preserving this age-long form of linguistic expression in Nigeria and Africa at large.

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