

PITA NWANA'S OMENUKO: A CLASSIC IGBO NOVEL PAR EXCELLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Pita Nwana and his historic novel, Omenuko, are undoubtedly very significant in the discussion of Igbo Literature, in particular and indigenous African Literature, in general. Apart from the fact that Omenuko was the first meaningful novel to be published in the Igbo Language, the novel is also quite remarkable in many other aspects which accounts for the special class Omenuko occupies in comparison to other novels so far published in the Igbo Language. In spite of all these, it is unfortunate to note that there is at present a dearth of serious critical studies on the novel. This study is animated by the need to contribute to the critical exegesis of this great novel. In particular, it seeks to identify and highlight the unique features of this novel, as well as evaluate its impacts on the development of indigenous Igbo Literature and indeed Nigerian written literature. The study adopted the survey method for x-raying the subject matter of the novel from four major perspectives – the life and times of the author (Pita Nwana); the historical background of the novel; the unique features of the novel that qualify it as a literary classic; and finally, the novel's contributions to the development of the Igbo novel. Our critical approach is thus biographical and exegetical. In conclusion, this study strongly argues that Rita Nwana's Omenuko is sublime, historic and influential, and therefore, eminently qualifies as a classic Igbo novel par excellence.

Keywords: *Classic, Igbo novel, Pita Nwana, Omenuko, Igbo Literature.*

1. Introduction

In his very incisive and influential essay entitled "Pita Nwana," Ernest Emenyonu asseverates that:

Pita Nwana can be described as truly the father of the Igbo novel. His *Omenuko* published by Longman, London, in 1933, was the first full-length novel to be published in Igbo Language... *Omenuko* was a best-seller for Igbo readers for over three decades..., (though) very little is known of Pita Nwana. But Pita Nwana occupies a prominent place in the history of Igbo Literature. He is its pioneer craftsman, the ingenious pace-setter who stimulated as he founded the course of literary creativity in Igbo Language. ("Perspectives" 9, our parenthesis).

Elsewhere, he further asserts that:

...it is a biographical novel based on actual events in the life of the hero, Omenuko (real name: Igwegbe Odum) whose home in Okigwe, Eastern Nigeria, was a popular spot for field trips by students in schools and colleges, as well as favourite attraction for tourists in the decades before and after the Nigerian independence in 1960... The novel has been reprinted several times in various Igbo orthographies and is today a classic in Igbo literature ("translator's forward" ix).

The above observations by Emenyonu aptly capture the pride of place Pita Nwana and his historic novel, *Omenuko*, occupy in the literary history in Igboland in particular, and Nigeria, nay Africa, in general, especially with

regard to indigenous literature. It is ironic and regrettable, indeed, that while other novels of *Omenuko* stature published in other African languages (e.g. Zulu and Yoruba) have been accorded the literary respect they deserve; the same has so far eluded Pita Nwana's *Omenuko*. As Emenyonu brilliantly captures the point:

Omenuko is in the same category as two other novels in African Languages which are not only African Classics today, but like Omenuko, marked the beginnings of the novel in the languages in which they were published. They are: Chaka (Shaka) by Thomas Mofolo (Dec. 22, 1876 – Sept. 8, 1948) published in Sesotho Language in 1931, and Ogboji Ode ninu Igbo Irunmale by D.O. Fagunwa (1903 – Dec. 9, 1963) published in Yoruba language in 1938. ("Translator's Foreword" ix)

It is necessary to note that while the former, based on the life history of King Zulu, the founder of the Zulu empire early in the 19th century, was translated into English by Daniel P. Kuneme as far back as in 1981, and the latter, based on Yoruba myth, was translated into English as *The Forest of a Thousand Daemon: A Hunter's Saga* as early as in 1968 by Wole Soyinka, Pita Nwana's *Omenuko* just got translated into English in 2014 by Ernest Emenyonu. This shows that, indeed, comparatively speaking, *Omenuko* has not received its due scholarly attention. Relatedly, whereas critics have paid significant attention to the study of much – later novels by Chinua Achebe like *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1960), Wole Soyinka (*The Interpreters*) and Flora Nwapa (*Efuru*), to mention just a few, - novelists who came into the African literature scene comparatively far much – later than Pita Nwana, African literary critics have hardly paid any attention to the exegesis of Pita Nwana only, though very important literary legacy: *Omenuko* (1933).

Indeed, the present critical silence on Pita Nwana's *Omenuko* truly calls for serious concern, especially among scholars and critics of African indigenous literature for very obvious

reasons. First, as Charles Nnolim has rightly observed, "art unaccompanied by criticism is dead art" (89). Implicit in this observation is that *Omenuko* as a novel may be eventually lost to the literary world if critics continue to keep it in limbo. Second, the moral values embedded in this great novel may equally be lost to the literary world unless critics turn attention to the study of the novel, which highlights the fact that a good name is better than ill-gotten wealth. Third, and very significant, giving adequate critical attention to *Omenuko* can help in drawing attention to the urgent need for Nigerians, nay Africans, to revitalize many comatose indigenous Nigerian languages, of which the Igbo Language is one. As A.B.C. Duruaku has rightly observed:

It is estimated that several hundreds of cultures are dying out in a few years; many more will join the growing rank of dead languages. Indeed, over four hundred and seventy-three languages are classified in the ethnologue as nearly extinct.... (qtd. In Amaechi 479)

And in his insightful recent books: *Endangered Languages in Nigeria* (2010) and *Empowering Small Nigerian Languages* (2010), Nolue Emenanjo specifically lists the Igbo Language as one of the seriously endangered Nigerian languages which may soon face extinction if urgent steps are not taken to revitalize them. As we know, literature remains one sure means of revitalizing languages. As David Jowitt has noted, William Shakespeare and some of his patriotic contemporary English writers revitalized the English language after it had been eclipsed; first by Latin, and later by French after the Norman Conquest of 1016 (86-87). It is, therefore instructive for African writers and scholars to devote much attention to writing and studying works written in their indigenous languages, which Afro-centric scholars have argued, constitute the core pillar of African literature (Wali 13; Maduka 2). The present study is prompted by these significant concerns. Furthermore, the novel, *Omenuko*, is worth reading, worth deliberating upon, worth

researching into, worth commemorating and, indeed, worth celebrating – not only for the strategic position it occupies in the annals of the development of Igbo written literature, but also for its topical content, its socially-relevant themes, its fascinating and innovating techniques, its simple and natural diction, its positive impacts on subsequent literary works of its kind, as well as its contributions to the study and promotion of Igbo language and culture, all of which have transmuted the novel into a classic in Igbo literature. As Emenyonu puts it:

Pita Nwana's *Omenuko* was truly a work of art conceived by an Igbo for the Igbo about the Igbo. Its great success seems a good augury for the revival of vernacular literature among the Igbo. It immediately awakened in the Igbo a spontaneous love for reading (*The Rise* 58)

Interestingly, in spite of its age and pioneering status, *Omenuko* still commands a lot of popularity among the Igbo reading public of various educational attainment and backgrounds, as well as appeals to the old and the young alike. The wise sayings and witticisms it encapsulates are so keenly memorized and commonly adroitly applied by most Igbo speakers who have read the novel in their day-to-day speeches and interactions that they have become significant aspects of their verbal norms. This study will apply insights from the biographical approach to literary criticism in the discussion of Pita Nwana's *Omenuko*.

Biographical Approach to Literary Criticism

The biographical approach to literary criticism is an author-centred method of literary exegesis. In it, critical attention is mainly beamed on the author whose marks are often presumed to be products of his/her own personal observations and experiences. Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker and George Perkins define biographical criticism as "an examination of a literary work in relation to the life of the author" (72). In spite of serious attacks by formalist-oriented critics that biographical criticism is "diversionary" as well as constitutes "biographical fallacy" (Frye et al., 72),

biographical critics strongly maintain, as Altick has noted, that "knowledge of authorship... far from diverting the critic from his proper business, lights him on his way" (Altick, 12). He further affirms that "...the fact remains that behind the book is a man or woman whose character and experience of life cannot but be overlooked in any effort to establish what the book really says" (5).

A good example of biographical criticism is Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81) in which he did a ground-breaking study of the lives, times and experiences of some English Renaissance era poets. Biographical criticism is genealogically related to sociological criticism whose main tenet, according to Wilbur Scott, is that:

...art's relationship to society are vitally important, and that the investigation of these relationships may organize and deepen one's aesthetic response to a work of art. Art is not created in a vacuum; it is the work not simply of a person, but of an author fixed in time and space, answering to a community of which he is an important,... articulate part.... (123)

Scott concludes that, "the sociological critic, therefore, is interested in understanding the social milieu and extent to which and manner in which the artist responds to it" (123). The biographical approach to literary criticism is, thus, deemed appropriate for our present discussion of Pita Nwana's *Omenuko*, a recreation of well-known events in Igboland.

The Life and Times of Pita Nwana

It was in the early days of colonialism in Igbo land. By then, the Christian Missionary activities were sweeping across Igbo land like whirlwind – the era Chinua Achebe graphically and beautifully dramatized in his famous novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). By then, some of the cultures of the native inhabitants were coming in conflict with the invading white man's way of life which they were subtly and cleverly imposing on the unsuspecting natives. Nevertheless, some

aspects of the Igbo man's cultural setting and traditions were still intact. And although slave trade had been officially abolished, the practice had not been completely eliminated.

Generally, life in Arondizuogu, the birth place of Igwegbe Odum, the Omenuko of history, was not free from the fierce culture conflict in Igboland. Missionary churches and schools were still few and far in between. The colonialists imposed indirect rule on the Igbo nation which, hitherto, more or less had no seriously organized kingship system as was then practiced by the Hausa and the Yoruba. The emergent colonial rulers then dethroned authentic traditional rulers and in their stead appointed renegades, blacklegs, impostors and sycophants as warrant chiefs, interpreters and spokesmen for the people.

It was during this tempestuous period that Pita Nwana was born in Ndianiche village in Arondizuogu in the present-day Imo State, Nigeria, possibly in 1890. Pita was the eldest son of Nwana Izuogu and Mgbokwo Inyang Kanu, all of Ndianiche, Arondizuogu. He grew up in the village, and thus was nurtured in his people's culture and traditions. An energetic and exceptionally gifted child, Pita Nwana did not attend any formal school, yet he amazingly later became a literary guru in Igbo literature. Pita and his younger brother, Chima Nwana (later Rev. Chima Nwana, father of Professor O.C. Nwana) came in contact with Christianity in those early days of colonialism through which they became literate. For this reason, their father, a titled culturalist in Arondizuogu, drove them away in order to maintain his "high social status" and dignity – because in those days, traditionalists perceived Christianity as an anathema. Following this development, Pita and Chima went to live at Onitsha, presently the commercial hub of Anambra State, Nigeria, where Chima was employed as a house servant. Later, through some connection, Pita proceeded to Oba (also in the present-day Anambra State, Nigeria) and became apprenticed to a carpenter.

They later, in the early twenties, went back

to Arondizuogu as full-fledged Christians and reconciled with their father whom they later converted into Christianity. Ironically, while it was Pita who encouraged Chima to go to school and he (Chima) later became a Reverend gentleman under the Methodist Mission. It was Chima who later taught Pita how to read and write during the former's holiday periods. Later, Rev. Chima Nwana was stationed at the Methodist Institute, Uzuakoli, where Pita himself lived and worked as a mission carpenter until his death in 1968. The great novel, *Omenuko*, was written by this humble but very hardworking carpenter – Pita Nwana.

The Historical Background of *Omenuko*

Pita Nwana's only work, *Omenuko*, was published in 1933, after winning a prize in All-African literary contest in indigenous African languages organized by the International Institute for African Languages and Culture in the same year. In this pioneer modern Igbo biographical-cum-historical novel, Pita Nwana tells a story of his hero, Omenuko, a prosperous trader who goes on a mandatory self-imposed exile after committing a heinous crime of selling his apprentices and some of his kinsmen into slavery out of frustration – a crime against the people and the gods of the land – and later returns home, not necessarily because he has completed a mandatory expiation for the atonement of the crime but because he is compelled by circumstances beyond his control. The story is woven around the life and times of Igwegbe Odum, the Omenuko of history, a man that lived in Arondizuogu about the period under review and died about the year 1940. Igwegbe Odum, like Pita Nwana, hailed from Arondizuogu and as the events of the entire story unfold, all fingers point to the fact that Pita Nwana was so fascinated by the personality and character of his hero that out of sheer admiration and reverence for him, he painted a picture of an immortal being living among mortals. His moralization, which gradually metamorphosed into real preaching (see *Omenuko* Ch. 15) is, to say the least, aimed at making the reader to marvel at

the hero's personality and strength of character and by this means, he succeeds in transforming the real self of his hero – an ordinary human being, perhaps above average in wit and strength of character, with his good and bad sides, into that of a demi-god and an immortal being, Emenyonu is of the opinion that Pita Nwana, no doubt, is emotionally involved in the story, especially as it concerns the elevation of Omenuko's personality. According to Emenyonu:

There is no doubt that Nwana has a great deal of admiration for his hero, and this affects his portrayal of Omenuko as a character. Nwana seems at pains to improve Omenuko's image... (The Rise 47)

Adiele Afigbo acquiesces with Emenyonu's submission above. He opines that, unfortunately, in historiography excessive admiration for and worship of heroes tend to deprive them of their humanity by making legends of them. So it was with Igwegbe Odum. In the hands of his great admirer and fellow clansman, he became a legend in his time... Pita Nwana is not the only Aro writer who has been fascinated by the political career of Chief Igwegbe Odum (222-231).

Towards the end of the same essay (pp.230-231), Afigbo concludes that: "Indefatigable in his quest for fame, he (Igwegbe Odum) had the satisfaction of living (he died in 1940) to see himself made into a legend by Pita Nwana's Omenuko".

The novel *Omenuko*, published four years after the commencement of the long-drawn Igbo orthography dispute (1929), was not immediately followed by subsequent publications due to the retarding impact of the dispute. According to Nnabuenyi Ugonna, It (*Omenuko*) was born into a controversial Igbo literary climate; into an atmosphere of bitter religious rivalry masking as genuine orthographic debate, a situation that virtually halted the publishing of Igbo literary works. The Igbo literary work was, as it were, planted into a disputed and infertile literary soil and although it germinated, it refused to grow and, like a malnourished child,

it stagnated (31).

The above situation, as aptly painted by Ugonna notwithstanding, *Omenuko* remained resolute and determined to survive after weathering through these storms. It survived the orthography dispute, having succeeded in moving from its original orthographic toga, the lepsi, to the imposed orthographic toga, the Ida-Ward and finally and triumphantly into its present and permanent one, the Onwu orthography. Today, *Omenuko*, for its originality and impeccable artistic quality remains the most readily available Igbo novel in the market, the most popular, the most patronized and indisputably the Igbo novel of all times.

The Classic Quality of *Omenuko*

Omenuko is a classic novel in many ways. By being classic, we refer to those qualities that make the novel stand out on a platter of high profile or on any elevated class, especially when one considers the age versus timelessness of the literary work in question. These qualities transmute a literary work into what critics and literary aficionados call a classic. M.H. Abrams and .G.G Harpham define a classic as a "literary work that is widely agreed to have achieved excellence and to have set a standard in its kind" (236). A classic work has the elevated style which Longinus refers to as the "sublime": "a certain excellence and distinction in expression..." (qtd in Nwahunanya 23).

First and foremost, is it not marvelous in our eyes and thoughts that a literary work written by a man who did not have the privilege of attending formal schooling could make waves and stand the test of time both in content and in style? Coupled with this is the fact that the work is quite original; this originality makes it unique and also tick. Secondly, *Omenuko* enjoys the status of being the first serious literary work to be written in Igbo Language with its 1933 date of publication. In spite of the contentious assertion made by O.R. Dathorne, to the effect that *Omenuko* was actually published in 1935 after winning the All-African contest in indigenous works in African Languages in 1933 (365), and

despite S.U. Obi's claim (365) that *Omenuko* was not the first serious Igbo literary work to be published, since according to him, *Ala Bingo* by D.N. Achara was published in 1933, and *Omenuko*, in 1935 (120), the indisputable fact remains that the work won a prize in 1933 and must have been read by people that year or at the least, by the judges who assessed it and declared it the best in 1933. If there was no *Omenuko* in 1933, how then could there have been an award to a non-existent literary work in 1933?

Among the Igbo novels so far written, *Omenuko* remains the most prominent and successful. As earlier noted, *Omenuko*, the protagonist, is Pita Nwana's fictionalization of Igwegbe Odum, the intriguing man who really lived and operated in Arondizuogu. This man, according to some very reliable oral sources, was very powerful, very terrible, very industrious and, of course, very influential. It was this Igwegbe Odum of history that Pita Nwana transmuted into *Omenuko* of fiction with such a wonderful artistic dexterity and craftsmanship that has continued to draw admirations and commendations from one generation of readers to another. Adopting the technique of name symbolism, Pita Nwana artfully named his eponymous protagonist "Omenuko", which literally means "one that makes wealth in a moment of scarcity and hardship".

Christian Chidi Ukagu has noted that some Nigerian writers, notably Gabriel Okara (*The Voice*), Ken Saro-Wiwa (*Sozaboy*) and Chukwuemeka Ike (*Sunset at Dawn*) have deftly deployed the technique of name symbolism to project meaning and enhance effective characterization in their respective novels ("A Stylistic Analysis" 124). Elsewhere, he similarly observed that Ifeoma Okoye deftly deployed the technique for the same purpose in her highly satiric novel, *Men Without Ears* ("Satire and Social Criticism" 226).

It is noteworthy that in creative writing, there are three major ways of converting historical facts into fiction. They are: changing

the events of the entire storyline, changing the names of the historical characters and, of course, changing the real historical setting of the story. Pita Nwana artfully applied these rules in his recreation of the life history of Igwegbe Odum in *Omenuko*. For instance, regarding the events of the historical storyline, he made a lot of cover ups of Igwegbe Odum's actual negative qualities and weaknesses and came up with *Omenuko*, the great achiever, *Omenuko*, the legendary entrepreneur, *Omenuko*, the ideal personality that eventually propitiated for his earlier sins and ended up a hero, rather than a villain. In the aspect of changing real personages' names, Pita Nwana changed Igwegbe Odum's name to *Omenuko* in order to add freshness to the story as well as enhance its meaning via the technique of name symbolism and the same is true of some other real historical names that will be revealed to those who knew the true life story of Igwegbe Odum and other characters that were in interplay around his life. With regard to the changes in setting, only a few names of the places mentioned in the novel are real names that can still be traced around Arondizuogu and beyond: Ezinnachi, Awka and Umulolo. But majority, such as Mgborogwu, Ikpaoyi, Igwu and a lot of others are fictitious.

Related to this is the issue of setting. The storyline has two temporal settings. The first one is before the advent of the white man, which covers *Omenuko*'s life from the beginning up till this self-exile to Mgborogwu, while the second one is from his sojourn in Mgborogwu up till his final return to his home town, Arondizuogu.

One other thing that helps to enhance the quality of this work, thus making it exceptional from other novels so far written in Igbo Language, is the apt and judicious use the author made of the proverbs and witticisms he employed in the work. One thing worthy of note here is that all of these wise sayings and proverbs are deftly woven into the fabric of the story. They are all original Igbo sayings and are very effectively used in positions they are employed for maximum effect. There are several prominent

Igbo proverbs in the novel that effectively serve as toner to the entire story as far as illumination is concerned. One of them, located on Page 18, is 'a stitch in time saves nine', the other located on Page 59 says that 'when a man is feeling some itching, he goes to a fellow man for an assistance, while an animal feeling some itching, goes to a tree trunk for his solution'; the third one is found on Page 8, and it states that 'those who rush to war do not know that war portends or connotes or predisposes death'. According to Emenyonu:

Pita Nwana's technique is to use proverbs, aphorisms in their Igbo cultural milieu and where they are most appropriate to reinforce content or convey serious thoughts in a delicate situation without recourse to simple blunt words. In the novel, the proverbs are important for what they say about either situation of conflict or the peculiar actions of the major character. (The Rise 48)

Another major technique Nwana dexterously used in *Omenuko* is the voyage technique, a form of journey motif whereby the protagonist, Omenuko, embarks on self-exile and later returns. This technique, which Achebe later adopted in *Things Fall Apart*, could also be seen in Homer's *Odyssey and Iliad*, some 18th century English classics like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, as well as in Olaudah Equiano's landmark autobiographical novel, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olauda Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa; Written by Himself* (1789).

The Impact of *Omenuko* on Subsequent Igbo Written Fictions

From what we have said so far about the *Omenuko*, and the factors that help to make the work popular, we shall not be at pain in arriving at the fact that once it is bound not only to influence the content of subsequent works in Igbo, but also to engender some drive in people to write, and thus contribute in progressive multiplication of Igbo written literature. But before delving into these two aspects of impacts, let us refresh our minds with Emenyonu's

assertion on the whole business of *Omenuko's* impact on both the reader and Igbo literary development in general. According to Emenyonu:

Pita Nwana remains a formidable name in the historical development of modern Igbo literature. Today, Omenuko appeals more to students of Igbo language and culture and learners of Igbo language... (The Rise 58).

We have to quickly add here that it also appeals to all Igbo enthusiasts and patrons of Igbo language, for it is from this novel that further writings in Igbo Language later emerged. This study looks at the issue of impact from two angles;

Direct or Practical Impact on Subsequent Works

Historically, after the publication of *Omenuko* in 1933, the issue of Igbo orthography dispute in particular and the issue of Igbo man's mentality over his language (abandoning Igbo in preference for English) in general, virtually killed the enthusiasm in Igbo writers and thus prevented most of them from following the example of Pita Nwana in creating literature in the indigenous language, the era which Emenyonu described as 'Transition from writing in Igbo to writing in English' (*The Rise 60*). Nevertheless, *Omenuko's* influence remains compelling and overwhelming. In the forties, it remained the most popular Igbo literature book read in schools in Igbo land in conjunction with D.N. Achara's *Ala Bingo* and a few other missionary or mission – sponsored pamphlets, such as Ahamba's *Azu Ndu*. In the early fifties, in 1952, to be precise, two other Igbo literature books emerged. They are D.N. Achara's *Elelia Na Ihe O Mere* and Bell-Gam's *Ije Odumodu Jere*. While the former, in its folktale-oriented epic story of Elelia and his quest adventures, tries to recapture Omenuko's personality and adventurous spirit as the chief character, the latter, *Ije Odumodu Jere*, bears some vivid marks of *Omenuko's* influence which are evident in the fact that there are common incidents in the plot and structure of the two works, especially as they affect two main characters of the work –

Omenuko and Odumodu. For instance, both men inherit the throne (by will) of the land of their sojourn. Both men are strangers or sojourners – Omenuko in Mgborogwu and Odumodu in Finda. Both men are involved in a dispute over succession in their lands of sojourn. Both experience loss in water – Odumodu in a shipwreck and Omenuko in a river after the collapse of River Igwu bridge. They are both given very responsible positions in their lands of sojourn: Omenuko, a warrant chief, the spokesman and representative of the people; Odumodu, the secretary of the state. They are both held in high esteem and extolled for their wisdom and forthrightness. Both are very successful and popular in their lands of sojourn. They are also both forced out of their lands of sojourn by circumstances beyond their control. Before this, they both experienced movement from their original place to another place within the lands of their sojourn – Omenuko, from Mgborogwu to Ikpa Oyi and Odumodu from Finda to Mimba. The only minor difference in the events of the two stories and the way they are structured is that the circumstances that forced Omenuko out of his homeland differ from that under which Odumodu left his homeland, just as the conditions in which the two men get back home vary – Omenuko goes home with all his wealth, personal effects and family, but Odumodu goes home virtually empty handed. Finally, the themes of the two works are the same – “the sojourner must one day get back home”. It is interesting to note also that Ubesie whose works that appeared after the civil war, that is after 1970, demonstrate a tendency towards hero – worshipping of some of his chief characters as Pita Nwana does with Omenuko. His two works that highlight this trend are *Mmiri Oku Eji Egbu Mbe*, a fabulistic novel and *Juo Obinna*. The heroes of these two novels – Enyi and Obinna, respectively, are real criminals, but are adored and revered by their creator, Ubesie, to the point of giving Enyi the status of a saint and Obinna, the status of a champion or a hero. Also, he sees and regards their acts of

brigandage, mischief and trickstering as acts of bravado and nobility, just like the popular English tale: “Robin Hood” in which the rogue is beatified. Protagonist is beatified. He achieves this by emphasizing and highlighting their good sides, while suppressing their bad sides. There is the possibility that Ubesie is influenced by *Omenuko*, it could also be a sheer ideological coincidence.

Indirect or Psychological Impact on Creating Further Works

This aspect of impact may not necessarily be observable, but could be working out in the form of a psychological force made manifest in positive thinking, drive and the urge to create a useful atmosphere suitable for executing the ideals for promoting writing in Igbo Language. This type of impact could also be seen as remote because it is not prone to yielding ready-made evidence in practical terms. It is natural that anything good and beautiful is admired and naturally too, there is the tendency to occupy or imitate anything that has a rare quality and is appealing to the mind. The appearance of *Omenuko*, the time it did, the author of *Omenuko* and his kind of man, all put together and placed side by side with the literary quality of the book make the reader, the aspiring writer and even the critic of the work behold it with awe, wonder and fascination. To these people, there is some ‘magic’ in this work by an unschooled missionary carpenter that makes it stand the test of time. Even in the trying and tempestuous period of the great Igbo orthography dispute (1929-1961), *Omenuko* was not shaken nor put out of print. The book weathered through all the storms emanating from this orthography war. It is the psychological impact which the literary quality of this work leaves in the minds of its readers, coupled with the unending quest for this ‘rare gem’ that keeps propelling the publishers to keep the work afloat in print even in an atmosphere of uncertainty as to which direction the wind of orthography controversy blows them.

2. Conclusion

The story of Igwegbe Odum as told by Pita Nwana in *Omenuko* is very exciting and appealing to literary scholars of all ages. In addition to the nature of the story, the realness of the setting, the naturalness of the harmonization of the episodes and events, all fashioned out of the expert and exquisite development of the plot so vitalize the work that the story always remains vivid and indelible in the minds of readers, writers and critics. Nor is there any need to continue to belabor the fact that Nwana's ingenuity in the use of the Igbo language and expression in the work helps to make the content ready 'food' for the memory. As these impressions register in the mind or memory, they do not remain dormant there. They, in fact, agitate the mind because of their challenging nature. They are like the hot boiling and smelting lava embedded beneath the bowel of a rocky mountain, seeking for a vent through a volcanic eruption. They thus constitute a force, pushing the reader to appreciate, the aspiring writer to write, and the reviewer, essayist or critic to take to his pen for a critique, and so the development of written Igbo literature progresses steadily and manifestly.

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In the words of Adiele Afigbo, "Though not initially conceived as a fiction, this book, perhaps so far and from a literary point of view is one of the greatest achievements in the Igbo Language" (222). Emenyonu concurs when he pronounces *Omenuko*, "a masterpiece, and Nwana a writer of all seasons" ("Pita Nwana" II). Indeed *Omenuko*, remains the Igbo novel of a class and of all times and its legendary author, Pita Nwana, undoubtedly to the Igbo literary world what Homer is to the Greek; Virgil to the Roman; Moliere to the French; and Chaucer and Shakespeare to the English. His historic novel, *Omenuko* has similarly undoubtedly transmogrified itself into a literary Bible among literary aficionados in Igbo literature. It is a classic novel par excellence whose historical significance in the annals of Igbo literature is akin to those of Thomas Mofola's *Chaka* in Zulu indigenous literature and D.O. Fagunwa's *Ogboji Ode ninu Igbo Irunmale* in Yoruba indigenous literature.

Now that *Omenuko* has finally been translated into English by Ernest Emenyonu, it is hoped that the wider reading public can share in its sublimity and social relevance.

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