

## Stylistic Analysis of the Narrative Structure of the *Scream of Ola* by Onyekachi Peter Onuoha

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### Abstract

Stylistics is the linguistic study of style in language. It aims to account for how texts project meaning, how readers construct meaning and why readers respond to texts in the way that they do. This work, therefore, is a stylistic analysis of the narrative structure used in Onyekachi Peter Onuoha's novel *The Scream of Ola*. The structure of a narrative defines the purpose of a work. More than simply giving an audience what they expect, the proper formation of character, plot, theme, and genre communicates the artist's deepest intent. The study affirms that story structure may not be everything, but everything purposeful needs structure.

### Introduction

Stylistics is the study of the language *in* literature. It put the discussion of textual effects on a public, shared, footing- a footing as shared and established and inspectable as is to informed language-users... it persists in the attempt to understand technique, or the craft of writing. It brings to the close examination of the linguistic particularities of a text an understanding of the anatomy and functions of the language. It is concerned with excellence of technique; traditionally, its attention has been directed to such excellence of craft in works of literature (Michael Toolan 2010)

Narrative structure is a literary element that describes the structural framework that underlies the order and manner in which a narrative is presented to a reader, listener, or viewer. Its structures are story and plot. Put differently, it is the content of a story and the form used to tell the story. Elements such as foreshadowing (Looking ahead)-create suspense, flashbacks (looking back)are used to tie themes together. Flashback and foreshadowing are different ways to accomplish the same end: to introduce events that are not happening in the story's current moment. While flashback, as suggested by the name, takes the reader back into a past moment, foreshadowing hints at or presages an event that has yet to come. Done well, both can increase a story's dramatic tension and deepen a character's development.

Sociolinguist William Labov in 1972 identified six common elements that appear in a natural narrative, usually in the following order:

1. Abstract: This is a short summary, usually one sentence that reveals the point of the story; How does it begin?
2. Orientation: Who was involved? When and where was this? identification of the time, place, persons, the orientation builds on the information included in the abstract and often includes a more detailed description of the main character; the

orientation has the function of orienting the listener or reader to when and where the story takes place,

3. Complicating action: This refers to the main body. So what happened first? Then what happened? Sentences in which the all-important and ordered events of the narrative are reported. Without a complicating action a story would not have a plot

4. Evaluation: the storyteller's commentary on why the story is tellable; in natural and personal narratives the evaluation is usually concentrated into a single area that delays the resolution, although evaluative comments may exist throughout the story

5. Result or resolution: the second part of the story's core, which includes the final action/action of the story and resolves the problem introduced as the complicating action.

6. Coda: a statement to end the story

Note that there is no hard and fast rule here in that structures can be placed in any order. A novel can start *in medias res*, near the end, or the beginning.

In the *Scream of Ola* the author addresses the pain, vulnerability, hurt, social crisis that women experience. He writes to give them a voice, a place of dignity, courage to actually live and be achievers in a society that is prevalent in social ills as sexual assault, harassment, rape, and violence against women which are severe human rights violations. Although men and boys experience gender-based violence as well, women around the world are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, both during peace and wartime. According to the World Health Organization, more than 35 percent of women experience physical and sexual violence throughout their lifetime.

Sexual assault and rape are extremely traumatizing as seen in the *Scream of Ola*, with life-long repercussions for the victim's well-being. In addition, the prevalence of violence against women has adverse effects on economic growth and development.

Marital infidelity, or unfaithfulness, play out in the text in focus. There are a number of reasons people engage in adultery, but the majority of cases occur because of a need to be emotionally connected. Human beings have a deep need to be wanted, needed, and understood. Ideally, this need is met in a marital relationship. If the need is not met in a marriage relationship, a spouse may look to connect emotionally (and physically) elsewhere, which results in marital infidelity as seen in the case of Chika in *The Scream of Ola*.

The author draws the attention of the reader to the neglect of girl-child education which is one of the most effective ways of ending poverty in developing nations. The benefits of their education are obvious throughout society. It is often said that when you educate a girl child you educate a nation. Education is one of the most critical areas of empowerment for women. Offering girls basic education is one sure way of giving them much greater power of enabling them to make genuine choices over the kinds of lives they wish to live.

Another issue raised in the text is hasty marriage decision or desperation and that if a lady is much older than her husband, she may encounter some resentment from her family and in-laws.

### **Methodology**

For the purpose of this study, Onyekachi Peter Onuoha's novel, *The Scream of Ola* is examined for its stylistic importance of narrative structure. This text has been selected due to its literary techniques which are found in prose. This is obvious in the themes of sexual abuse, marital infidelity and its effect, poverty, girl-child education, power of words, hasty marriage decisions due to desperation, justice delayed is not justice denied and so on.

The examination of the above mentioned themes reveal the on-going ills in the society and the fact that writers are trying to address them through literary works like *The Scream of Ola*. This study examines some selected techniques and elements to show how stylistic tool of narrative structure has been used to project the themes like the use of flashbacks, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and so on.

### **Synopsis of the Novel**

*The Scream of Ola* is one of Onyekachi Peter Onuoha's several works. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar. The text is written in twelve titled-chapters in the omniscient point of view and was set in Owerri and Calabar.

It focuses on Ola whose father, Chukwu and mother Chika went their separate ways on the ground of marital infidelity between Chika and Akujobi, a single undergraduate male neighbor. As a result, Ola who was ten years old then was exposed to hardship and rape.

Her father's brother, Dr. Dike and wife took custody of her due to the ill treatment she received from her step mother before and after her father was transferred to Abuja for a job. Akujobi who at the time returned to Henshaw International School, Ola's new school where he taught as a part time teacher during his undergraduate days, resumed as a Physics teacher and he and Ola met one day. The duo went down memory lane and recalled they knew each other.

Ola in trying to mend the broken walls of her parents' relationship tried to find out from Akujobi what transpired between him and her mother as she remembered vividly what her father told her. Conversely, Akujobi said they had no sexual relationship. He went further to spend his money on her just to deceive her and pay her father back for the disgrace he brought to him in the then neighborhood therefore, he raped and violated her at the age of fifteen. This brought pain to her thereby making her vow to pay him back although he seemed to get away with all his evil deeds.

Ola proceeded to study Nursing Science at the University of Calabar and worked in the hospital with her Doctor uncle and foster father, Dike.

Meanwhile some years later, Akujobi pretentiously proposed to a woman sufficiently older than him just to distract his mother who pressured him to marry. As fate would have it, on his way to Calabar from Owerri to settle his past mistakes, he was involved in an accident which claimed every body's life saved his howbeit, he was unconscious. Consequently the governor's team took him to the hospital where Ola and her uncle worked as medical personnel.

Ilu, Akujobi's 'proposed' wife heard of the accident and then went in tears to see him in the hospital even though his mother did not accept her as a daughter –in-law. She was after the visit declared WANTED because his life was tampered with by injecting him with physotigmine –which could cause respiratory paralysis and loss of bowel control.

Upon hearing the declaration over the television, Ijeoma, Ilu's friend who had earlier warned her against marrying Akujobi because she barely knew him planned to deliver her to the police so as to use the 3million naira placed on her by the state government to fight for justice. This worked since Ilu was vindicated as the culprit was Ola who was the nurse that attended to Akujobi. Amazingly, the governor pardoned Ola after listening to her side of the story ...but Ugo, Akujobi's mother placed a curse on him long ago which haunted him. Finally, Akujobi was forgiven both by Ola and her father Chukwu while his mother openly reversed the curse.

### **Narrative Structure of the Novel**

The book is written in twelve short titled-chapters and it began *near the end*. Events here are not presented in chronological order thereby making the narrative style nonlinear. It is suspenseful, with well-developed ideas. The content has a clear logical sequence yet, a mix up of chronology that create suspense and then a satisfying ending. The author bypassed exposition and filled it in gradually through the use of dialogue and flashbacks. He began with a flashback before visiting the events of the story where Akujobi proposed to Ilu a woman well older than himself not because he really was interested in marrying her but because his mother was a distraction to his plans of going to Calabar to settle his past.

The author resorted to flash back technique in the complicating action gradually revealing how the problem of separation between Ola's parents was created in the fourth title *Nuptial Night*. Chukwu, a university undergraduate in his early 30s got married to Chika, 18 whilst yet to finish her secondary education. Few months later, they had Ola as their daughter. Akujobi was then employed by Chukwu to teach his wife who was preparing for her Senior Secondary School Examination. Unfortunately, Akujobi took advantage of Chukwu's constant lateness from work by sleeping with Chika on several occasions until he caught them in the very act on his return from his brother's burial.

This episode led to the break-up of Ola's parents thereby causing untold hardship for her if not for the timely intervention of her paternal uncle and aunt Dr. and Dr.

(Mrs) Dike who came to her rescue. Akujobi's wickedness and inordinate sexual desire led him to violate the maiden at age fifteen. Later, with the support of Dr. and Dr. (Mrs) Dike she went through the university.

At this point, in the resolution, the narrative rejoined the present with the governor apologizing to Ola for all she had gone through and ordered for their release (Ola and Dike). When Dike and Ola returned to the hospital, they saw Akujobi's mother trying to reverse the curse she placed on him *I have forgiven you, your education will not kill you...* Immediately Akujobi saw Ola and Dr. Dike he knelt down to beg for forgiveness. Chukwu, stepped in saw them and was almost turning back but was called by Ola who asked for forgiveness on Akujobi's behalf. The complications were resolved for good.

The narrative moved back in time in the last chapter with the author using another flashback to reveal the reason for the curse. Ugo (Akujobi's mother) had a land dispute with her brother-in-law Ibe, who threatened that she will live in sorrow all her life. Ugo created a scene and raised an alarm that Ibe had carried out his threat on Akujobi her son who was reported unconscious at the hospital.

This made the *Umunna* kinsmen to select some people to go in search of the truth: Okpara, four (4) elders, seven (7) youths including mama Oluchi and Akujobi's mother. On getting there it was revealed to them that she (Ugo) placed a curse on her son Akujobi thus *It is that book that will kill you! It is the book that you want to study that will claim your life.* She was made to understand that her words had haunted her son. The *debia* appealed to her to reverse the curse she placed on him.

### **Old Enough to be Your Mother**

The chapter began with

- a. Orientation: The use of orientation here is to acquaint the reader with the character ranging from information about his name, place of work, age, looks etc  
"Akujobi was very handsome and intelligent, worked with Ministry of Education. He was an indigene of Owerri, Imo State.. He had in the past had encounters with a lot of women that landed him in a police cell. He was thirty seven years old" (p11)
- b. Complicating action: The author introduced the major problems using marriage  
"I want you to get married so you can give me grandchildren" p12
- c. Resolution: The issue of marriage was handled by Akujobi's acceptance to bring a girl  
"Mother," I promise that before the expiration of next month I will introduce the lady I want to marry to you," (p12)
- d. Orientation: To carry the reader along the author the introduces the lady  
"He met a lady in her early forties...approached her...I am Ilu

Will you marry me? He asked her knowing full well that he did not mean it but it was a ploy to settle his mother while he sought his past deeds” p14

e. Evaluation: This the author used to share his opinion with the readers concerning what desperation can do and the foolishness surrounding hasty decisions thereby condemning Ilu’s decision.

“Ilu was flabbergasted. After many years of prayers the Supreme One had in the twinkling of an eye given her a husband but the choice was a wrong one; unknown to her. Even the age gap was a matter of concern to her but she convinced herself that God works in mysterious ways and this might be one of His mysteries. She ignored the voice in her that told her to wait for her time in the future” (p14)

f. Complication: The problems here are beginning to build up  
“Yes, I will marry you, she said. He drew closer and kissed her after he had fixed the engagement ring firmly on her finger” p14

g. Evaluation: The author’s opinion is condemnatory  
“Though Akujobi was inwardly sad, he had to pacify his mother in order to give him time to atone for his past” p14

h. Orientation: Further information about Akujobi’s would-be wife and how far he could pretend  
“Ilu was a business woman who dealt in women’s wear and jewellery. She shuttled her business between Calabar and Owerri. She owned a personal home in Owerri but stayed in her friend’s place whenever she was on business trips to Calabar....p15

i. Evaluation: “The next morning Akujobi entered his car and drove straight to his mother’s house...She wondered what had happened to her son because for many years he had not visited her so early, except when there was something important to discuss.” P15

“He said in false pretense over his perceived found pearls...He left his mother’s house a very happy man knowing that he had achieved a means of pacifying his mother and he would look for solutions to his problem. He went directly to his would-be spouse’s place.” P15

j. Complicating action: “Welcome my son, “she replied. “Where is the girl you promised to come with?”

Complicating action: Akujobi led his mother to where Ilu was seated and she followed him with enthusiasm. “Where is the lady you came with?” “There she is,” he replied. She ignored him and asked again. “Is she a friend to the lady you want to marry?” P16

k. Evaluation: She pointed at her direction although the lady was absorbed in the decoration of the house. She held her son’s hand to prevent him from moving further.P17

Complicating action: “Mum!” he exclaimed. “I hope you are fine?” P17

1. Evaluation: He asked in pretense and smiled knowingly. P17  
Complication action: “All isn’t well, my son!” She blurted out. “Is that why you are holding my hand so firmly?” he asked in frustration. “Yes my son, I must hold you from this wrong path you are about to tread. For it is full of thorns in many ways,” “Mother! What have I done wrong?” P17

Evaluation: He feigned surprised rather than being annoyed. His exclamation attracted Ilu’s attention. P17

Complicating action: “Please, my son, can we see upstairs?” she requested as her face revealed how disappointed she was in him. “What’s the problem?” Akujobi asked. “Nothing my son, I just want to have a talk with you,” she said as she hurried back upstairs. P17 “My son, you have made the wrong choice. It is mature eyes that know ripe maize; the lady I saw is old enough to be your mother. I sent you to the university to learn how to live like a normal human being and you have kept to my word in the past and I believe the present matters to me very much. That is why I say you mustn’t marry a woman who is old enough to be your mother,” she blurted amidst tears. P17

Evaluation: Akujobi smiled when his mother spoke. P17

Complicating action: “Mother, it is my decision to marry a woman that is older than me,” ... “Not when I am alive,” “Mother, I want to marry somebody older than me because I think she can die before me and leave her assets to me and the children to enjoy the assets we acquired together alone. Mother, you need not cry. I want to live like you; father died and left his assets to you because he was advanced in age when he married you. I want to marry a woman who is advanced in age so that she can die and leave her wealth to me,” he said. P18

Evaluation: His mother was stunned and felt her son was out of his mind. She picked her phone and called her doctor. P18

Complicating action: “Hello, Doctor Paul, can you come to my place? She requested. “Madam, I hope all is well?” “All is not well with my son,” she muttered into the phone. “What is wrong with him?” ... “He is having a mental problem,” she said P18

Evaluation: Akujobi ran downstairs with a fallen countenance, P18

Complicating action: “Sweetheart, let us go home,” he said sternly. “What is the matter? Where is your mother?” she asked at once. “I will explain later. But we have to leave now,” he said. P18

Evaluation: Before the doctor could arrive, Akujobi had stormed out with his would-be wife, leaving his mother in a pool of her own tears. P18

### Conclusion

This study has examined the use of narrative structure used in *The Scream of Ola* which has actually shown that there is no hard and fast rule when it comes to the order of a narrative. It can be chronological or mixed chronology what is important is to achieve the desired result.

The author used flashbacks which were like interruptions and later gradually filled in events like updates. The themes reflect some of the ills experienced by women in the society and how they are perceived by members of the society including the writer. The narrative techniques used in the text contribute P17 to the meaning of the text.

### References

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