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Literature as a vehicle for Ethical and Educational Transformation in Camillus Uka's *When the Wind Blows*

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Abstract: This work investigates literature as a compelling channel for ethical and educational transformation through a critical exploration of Camillus Uka's When the Wind Blows (2007). The study surveys how the novel exploits narrative techniques, characterization, and thematic concerns to advance moral consciousness and educational development within society. Relying on the assertion that literature functions not only as a basis of aesthetic pleasure but also as a medium for social instruction, the study examines the ethical values and pedagogical ideals embedded in the text. Through the ethical theory of Utilitarianism by Jeremy Bentham which imagines an individual's action in relation to the pleasure or pain it conveys on the cumulative number of people involved, this paper contends that Uka's When the Wind Blows (2007) elicits not only some ethical concerns that demand crucial response but also emphasizes the dire scandal of examination malpractice and its attendant consequences on the lives of individuals and society as well. The paper concludes that literature remains an essential instrument for modeling ethical values and nurturing educational transformation in contemporary society.

Key words: Literature, Ethics, Education, Transformation, Moral Consciousness, *When the Wind Blows*

INTRODUCTION

Literature has long functioned as a dominant medium for transmitting moral values, social ideals, and educational principles across generations. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, literature operates as a mirror of society, replicating human experiences while simultaneously shaping individual and collective consciousness. Through stories, characters, and conflicts, literary texts provide readers with opportunities to examine ethical

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dilemmas, cultivate critical thinking, and acquire valuable lessons that contribute to personal and societal development.

The interconnectedness of literature, ethics, and education has attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly in contemporary African literary discourse. African writers have consistently employed literature as a tool for social reformation, moral instruction, and intellectual enlightenment. Their works often address pressing societal concerns such as corruption, injustice, leadership failures, and the erosion of moral values, while advocating for positive transformation through education and ethical responsibility. Uka's engagement of mediocrity in the novel seems to be borne out of his disenchantment with compromise of meritocracy in the nation's educational system. This, however, buttresses Nnolim's (2014) submission that "Every generation of writers confronts the burning issues in its society and wrestles with them" (p. 158).

Elsewhere, Uka (2020) has enunciated his belief in quality education accessible through a reading culture with a slogan "let's go back to books, the sure ladder to excellence, read your books every day, read one book every week, read four books every month, read fifty two books every year and you will shine as a star" . It is, therefore, no surprise that *When the Wind Blows* (2007) demonstrates the projection of a reading cum studying culture which the protagonist of the novel, Adaku, brazenly repudiated. Awuzie (2017), in his analysis of the novel, identifies the challenges that have faced different generations of the African states and how African writers have been able to depict such challenges through their literary engagements.

Uka's *When the Wind Blows* (2007) exemplifies this tradition of socially committed literature. The novel presents a compelling narrative that explores the complexities of human conduct, societal expectations, and the transformative power of education. Through its portrayal of characters confronted with moral choices and social challenges, the text underscores the significance of ethical consciousness as a prerequisite for meaningful personal growth and communal progress. The novel further highlights education as a catalyst for empowerment, enlightenment, and social mobility. In the same vein, reflecting on the students' desperation for "success", Afolayan and Inyang (2005), citing Ike, reveal that "the inordinate scramble for the all-important Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) could lead anxious students and unscrupulous men to any length" (p.92). A reading of the novel raises not only ethical issues but also bears testimony against the character of Adaku, whose desperation for short-cut success structures the dominant discourse of this work.

This study further examines *When the Wind Blows* (2007) as a literary vehicle for ethical and educational transformation. It investigates how the novel articulates moral values, promotes ethical reflection, and advances educational ideals within its socio-cultural context. By analyzing the thematic concerns, characterization, and narrative strategies employed by Uka, the study demonstrates the capacity of literature to inspire moral development and foster educational awareness among readers. Ultimately, the paper argues that *When the Wind Blows* (2007) transcends mere storytelling to become an instrument of social change and human development.

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Literature as a vehicle for Ethical and Educational Transformation

Examination malpractice, when measured against the backdrop of Utilitarianism, becomes an act that is egoistic in nature and does not promote the general good of the populace. In differentiating utilitarianism from egoism, Julia Driver (2014) notes that "egoism has to do with the scope of relevant consequences. While on the utilitarianism view, one ought to maximize the overall good- that is, consider the good of others as well as one's own good" (p.15). Utilitarianism, therefore, is defined by Jeremy Bentham as "generally held to be the view that the morally right action is the action that produces the most good… that the theory is a form of consequentialism: the right action is understood entirely in terms of consequences produced" (p.6) (quoted by Driver (2014). In consonance to the above thought, John Stuart Mill reveals that people desire happiness — the utilitarian end — and that the general happiness is "a good to the aggregate of all persons." (p.81). Therefore, this definition provokes a serious ethical concern since one's action, to a very great extent, can cause serious consequences for the generality of people.

Driver (2014), citing Bentham, discusses Utilitarianism, which identifies the good with pleasure. He further advises human beings to maximize the good, that is, bringing about "the greatest amount of good for the greatest number" (p.5). Bentham's desire for legal and social reform influenced his thoughts on Utilitarianism. The understanding is that morally fitting actions will not hurt others, but instead spread happiness or utility. Driver (2014) reveals that Bentham's conviction was:

> influenced both by Hobbes' account of human nature and Hume's account of social utility. He famously held that humans were ruled by two sovereign masters — pleasure and pain. We seek pleasure and the avoidance of pain, they "…govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think…" Yet he also promulgated the principle of utility as the standard of right action on the part of governments and individuals. Actions are approved when they are such as to promote happiness, or pleasure, and disapproved of when they have a tendency to cause unhappiness, or pain. (p.6)

In view of the above thoughts, however, any action which does not seek or bring about the happiness of most people should be frowned upon. Bentham seems to be saying that humans should weigh the consequences of their actions on their fellow humans, whether it will bring happiness or pain to them. In *When the Wind Blows*, Uka's belief parallels with the principles of utilitarianism since the actions of the protagonist did not promote the happiness of society, but rather her actions inflicted so much pain on the people. However, Stephen Darwell (1995) views beyond the individuals' actions and emphasizes on the motives behind their actions. He notes:

> that the moral sense is concerned with motives… it is the motives rather than the consequences that are the objects of approval and disapproval. But inasmuch as the morally good person cares about what happens to others, and of course she will, she will rank order acts in terms of their effects on others, and reason is used in calculating effects. (16)

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However, both the protagonist's motives and actions are contrary to the values of utilitarianism; they do not promote the happiness of many people. Her involvements and subsequent attainments in life through corruption via examination malpractice simply underline the micro reflection of what is obtainable in Nigerian society at large. An apparent manifestation of poverty of mind in the Nigerian academic space is the undue recognition and scramble for "paper certificates" above skills acquisition and competency. The obnoxious crave for paper certificates instead of possession of skills and expertise has become an increasing goal among a large population of youths in Nigeria's educational system. To Adie and Oko (2016) "the quest for certificate in the face of poor academic performance has been identified as some of the major causes of examination malpractices in Nigeria" (p.59).

The enthronement of mediocrity in place of excellence seems to be a recurring factor that has not only reduced drastically the standard of education but has also affected almost every sector in Nigeria. Adie and Oko (2016) further state that "The hues and cries about examination malpractice taking place at all levels of the Nigerian educational system is nothing but a reflection of the decay in the value system of the society. The Nigerian society is that which celebrates mediocrity and views cheating as being smart" (p.60). In fact in Expo '77 (1980), the author Chukwuemeka Ike exposes the defiant justification of a mother whose daughter was arraigned for examination malpractice "Is it only the Lieutenant-Colonels? Who doesn't cheat in this country? The people in power. Top civil servants, contractors, judges, soldiers, policemen, pastors. Who doesn't cheat? (p.14)". Her mentioning of different professionals in the country as being guilty of cheating is, indeed, a grave indictment against society.

Ukah, through his protagonist Adaku, reveals that "Government establishments in such a corrupt country as mine suffered the fate of the public goat. Such institutions best existed as monuments of twenty first century retrogression and civilized mediocrity; governed by the whims of pot-bellied godfathers" (p33). Equally, citing Nnolim, Awuzie notes that "Seeing the level of poverty in the country, Ben Okri lamented on the state of the country through one of his characters in The Landscape Within, thus: 'I think ours is another damned generation of loss.' (cited in Nnolim,2009, p. 326). To Omoregbe (cited in Okaneme, 2013) such a generation is an immoral and a sick society:

> An immoral society is also a sick society. By immoral society we mean a society permeated with corruption, dishonesty, fraud, selfishness… such a society is sick and cannot be in sound order. Its organs cannot function properly because they are not in sound health condition. Life in such a society becomes increasingly difficult, insecure and unhappy. (p.135)

Quoting Maduemezia, Anzene (2014) identifies that "Examination malpractice is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. The first examination malpractice in Nigeria occurred in 1914 during the Senior Cambridge Local Examination where papers were leaked before the scheduled date of examination". (p.1). Ironically, this establishes examination malpractice as old as Nigeria given the fact that Nigeria came into existence as a country in 1914 through Lord Lugard's amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates. The

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perennial effects of examination malpractice, as emphasized by the author, is deeply rooted and extended to various sectors of the nation's polity like education, military, health, law among others. Lawal (2017) accentuates:

> The devastating effects of examination malpractices are usually expressed through the erosion of creativity, resourcefulness, ingenuity, technical know-how, and moral values. Industries and corporate organizations suffer because people who are qualified for the jobs are in the real sense not qualified for the jobs – they cheated their way through, most often through examination malpractices." (p.6)

Considering the subtle penetration of examination malpractice into the fabric of the society, and its colossal destructiveness, Ukah bares its implications on the soul of Nigerian nation on the long term basis. Using Hematology, the study of blood, to foreground his denigration of fraud in the novel demonstrates the author's intention in exposing what is seen as a bane of Nigerian educational system. Nnolim on the cover back of the novel considers the use of Hematology as a "touch of genius" on the part of the author, since blood is life essence. The usage of blood, which lies in the life of human beings, undoubtedly, connotes the relationship blood shares with a nation as a living entity. Metaphorically, the author uncovers the diseased blood (corruption) that has been responsible for the ailment of Nigeria. It purely reveals the extent of mortal damage the nation has been reduced to; revealing its condition as being terminal.

Given the influence of power, and its tendency to be abused by a few individuals, most Nigerian institutions have been subjected to the destructive nature of mediocrity. Almost every facet of the Nigerian state is bedeviled by mediocrity to the extent that those who are competent seldom gain employment to unleash their creativity. A "paper qualified" Adaku, who meritoriously graduated as a Medical Laboratory scientist, secures employment both in a government owned and private hospitals at different times not necessarily out of excellence but through dubious means. Subjecting her body as an instrument of job negotiation makes it possible for her to navigate her ways through the bureaucratic exigencies while retaining her job without difficulty. Manipulating the system to suit her selfish inclination has been a trade she learnt well from her mother during her days in primary school. Therefore, taking "shortcuts" to success has become a familiar path. To her, "the end justifies the means".

However, this arrangement, in spite of its transient condition, becomes a currency through which Adaku shops for her immediate convenience without considering the long term implications. Her educational itinerary, right from primary school to the university, has been one typified by examination malpractice. Therefore, her obvious incompetency in the work place is only a reward of her many years of academic compromise. Obasanjo's assessment of a perpetrator of examination malpractice accurately defines Adaku's motivation. (cited in Akinrefon, A.A, Adeniyi, O.I, Bamigbala, A.O. and Ikpa, O.C 2016). To him "[t]hey see education as a means of meal ticket, getting a job and so must acquire the paper qualification by hook or crook. We must change that perception or orientation so that they will appreciate the intrinsic value of education which is the total development of

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the individual to be able to make meaningful contribution to the family, community and nation" (p.177). Sadly, Nnolim (2008) identifies the novel as:

> a weeping novel, a lamentation at the depths into which corruption in [Africa] has descended even in its educational engagements where parents and educators assist their children to thoroughly corrupt the system whose probity they are supposed and expected to uphold". (p.160)

After her youth service while working in a hospital, she reaped her first fruit of "labour" which resulted in death. While on her many trips of truancy, a new Head of Department steps in and changes the course of events, which ultimately exposes her incompetence. In a twist of fate, she is "forced" to carry out a cross-matching test. Unfortunately, she could not perform it, which happens to be one of the simplest tests. Impulsively, she labels the wrong blood group on the specimen of the patient to avoid embarrassment. Expectedly, the death of the patient is not only imminent but also underscores the inevitable reward of retributive justice. Mr Eze, the dead patient, happens to be the husband of the Headmistress, who compromised her integrity by accepting a bribe from Adaku's mother during Adaku's Common Entrance Examination. Adaku's escape from the wrath of the law, however, reinforces her power of manipulation as she engages the Acting Chief Medical Director in an amorous relationship. To her, "I have no other option than to grit my teeth and fight… I had fought all through my university days to date, fighting to eat my cake and still have it" (p.44). Incidentally, her belief in manipulating events to her wishes paid off. The Acting Chief Medical Director pulled his strings, and her case was dropped, but after she had "used" and dumped him.

Adaku's incompetence does not end in her professional terrain, but it festers in her matrimonial home. She is so uninformed that she could not even contribute positively to her children's home assignments. A common question of what organism causes malaria unsettles her deeply. She dared not give a wrong answer to a child who had corrected her severally in pronunciations! To rightly reflect her current state, she recalls that "The wind is blowing" (p.249). The wind is blowing and her negotiated engagements with education have started unveiling. Her situation merely recalls the biblical parable of those who built their houses on rocky and sandy foundations. Those who built on the rock escaped damage during a windstorm, while those who built on the sand suffered great loss. Adaku basically builds her academics on a sandy foundation with ease, and the consequences of such endeavor have started unfolding! To further buttress the dire implications of academic "compromise" prevalent in Nigeria's educational system, the author incorporates the experiences of "half-baked" teachers whose academic ignorance and incompetence were clearly exposed. The story of inept English and Agriculture teachers is relieved by Adaku; while the English teacher fumbles at the teaching of "Superlative", the Agriculture teacher explains away the concept of "shifting cultivation".

Of primary significance to the breeding of "half baked" professionals, and the subsequent harvests of mediocrity in the socio-political and economic sphere of the Nigerian state, is the illicit and active participation of the so called "defender of education" as accomplices. Students, as represented by Adaku, could not have succeeded in their

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illegal negotiation of short-cut accomplishments, if the teachers and lecturers had maintained their pledges of integrity. While Adaku's parents, through their "fat envelopes", are able to influence their daughter's way up to the secondary school; Adaku extends and consolidates it to the university with her power of "female anatomy". In fact, Adaku's harvests of brilliant performances are nothing but mere dramatization of mediocrity as well as an indictment on the educational institutions. If Mrs Eze had remained unyielding in her pledge of integrity, she would not have lost her husband to incompetency! Her earlier compromise many years ago manifested in a situation she least expected. Adaku recalls disdainfully, her moment of initiation into examination malpractice:

I wished I could go back to that day and fight against my initiation into a practice that had become my undoing. Their well-intended help assumed the stature of barbaric savagery. I hated them all the more. Then a note of tragic coincidence struck me. The Headmistress, Mrs Eze, was the one whose husband died as a result of my incompetence. I remembered a saying that if one sees a fowl scratching at faeces, the person should chase it away because nobody knows who will eat the leg that had scratched the shit. How would she have known that the seed of incompetence she helped to sow would cause the untimely death of her husband? (p.127)

The author seems to be sounding a strong warning not only to the vendors of education but also to humanity at large because whatever one sows one reaps. Emenyonu (1994) rightly emphasizes that "Nigeria believes that it can produce lawyers, teachers, politicians, engineers, scientists, and professors without educating them. When they go into the world to perform, they are equipped with mental mediocrity and emptiness of character… we are only reaping what we sowed with reckless abandon in our indiscretion" (p.64)

Given her dexterity in fixing problems and reliance on manipulation of the system, the day of reckoning comes to her rather too soon, thereby exposing the content of her intellectual ineptitude. While in the hospital, praying for the speedy recovery of her husband, she is called upon to cross-match her husband's blood since the laboratory scientist on duty was not around. Incidentally, the laboratory scientist on duty is found later malingering and frolicking with her boyfriend in the darkness of night; revealing the rot that has eaten deep into the fabric of socio-political and economic life of the nation, where truancy is tolerated with impunity. As a "qualified" medical laboratory scientist, taking such a simple test would not have been a problem. Unfortunately, this encounter exposes her as an educated illiterate. Taking this case as an extended metaphor, the Nigerian best brain is facing destruction in the hands of incompetent leaders at the helm of affairs. Little wonder the authorial voice bemoans:

> 'I weep for this generation. I weep for a generation hunted by its own machination and ensnared by its own trap. I weep for a generation that squirms with the poison of its own concoction. Look at how a wasteful and backward looking generation has cut itself off from the source of life giving water. You can see that that water was designed to flow from the old formidable buildings to water the new buildings. But now the chasm has created a gap. (p.166)

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It is pertinent to note that the author did not present a totally hopeless situation. In spite of the dwindling fortunes of education, there are a few persons who still believe in the tenets of perseverance and determination. Ken, Adaku's husband, represents the author's model of academic success whose life is nearly cut short by incompetent hands! Considering the author's redemptive message, and his projection of hope, the survival of Ken in the novel stresses the triumph of meritocracy over mediocrity. Ken embodies a model of some graduates whose academic journeys are characterized by diligence, focus and hard work. Similarly, in Ike's *The Naked God* (1970), the author endorses the essence of merit and condemnation of fraud through the character of Professor Ikin, who was being lured to compromise his stand over the position of a Vice Chancellor. He asserts that "… I would rather remain unqualified than accept a doctorate degree… ARRANGED for me… I do not want an INSTANT Ph.D" (p.11). In other words, he prefers working for his success to mere acquisition of it.

Symbolically, that Ken survived gunshots shows that there is hope for the nation's education. Ken epitomizes the sound product of academic thorough-bred who secured his educational status through devotion and resilience. Ironically, Ken's marriage to Adaku not only unveils an intellectual mismatch at the home front, where home is the foundation of the society at large, but also a mismatch that is threatening the existence of Nigeria, where a lot of socio-political and economic mismatches have pitched the nation at the precipice of destruction. Juxtaposing the two individuals, the author is merely presenting the choice of meritocracy and mediocrity. He creatively, as well as deeply, carries out this vision through his novel substantiating the implications inherent in the choice one takes. Already, some students have taken the path of "shortcut" to success just to "really survive at all costs- even those that can barely read" (p.3) as enunciated by Awuzie (2017).

Conclusion

Contemplating on the foregoing experiences of the protagonist, as well as its predictable repercussions both on established institutions and human lives, the author's disenchantment with mediocrity is, indeed, sustained and quite revealing. Adaku's inability to carry out a simple test shows the extent of damage examination malpractice has caused in the educational system of Nigeria, and the government's insensitivity towards the dreadful state of the nation. Those who are not qualified are gainfully employed at the expense of the competent ones. Therefore, meritocracy becomes a lonely path seldom tread by the youths who are obsessed with instant success. However, the author degrades such enthronement of mediocrity by showing the eventual destruction of Adaku's certificate. Adaku realizes, rather too late, that possessing a paper certificate without the corresponding knowledge is nothing but a lethal weapon in the hands of an amateur. When Adaku's actions, however, are weighed on the scale of humanity; it is found wanting! Driver (2014) raises serious concerns:

> We are to promote pleasure and act to reduce pain. When called upon to make a moral decision one measures an action's value with respect to pleasure and pain according to the following: intensity (how strong the pleasure or pain is), duration

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> (how long it lasts), certainty (how likely the pleasure or pain is to be the result of the action), proximity (how close the sensation will be to performance of the action), fecundity (how likely it is to lead to further pleasures or pains), purity (how much intermixture there is with the other sensation). One also considers extent — the number of people affected by the action. (p.5)

Adaku's personality does not identify her as one who is capable of such contemplations because her egoistic nature will make such meditations impossible. She succeeded, through her actions, in bequeathing pain, unhappiness and misery to people in contrast to the ideals of utilitarianism. In conclusion therefore, the author's portrayal and repudiation of acquisition of fake certificates, and its attendant consequences, is wholly sustained in the novel through evaluation of its thematic concerns, characterization and stylistic employment of narrative techniques like flashbacks, symbols and metaphors. However, the author does not stop only at the exposition and condemnation of the ills plaguing the educational system; he also offers a solution. In one of her nightmares, Adaku recalls a sixty-five year old woman who embarked on academic redemption as a result of her inability to discuss or participate in a conversation with her white daughter-in-law in the English language. Despising shame and mockery, she eventually accomplished her goal of literacy and became proficient in the English language. It is the author's practical way of presenting the possibility of redemption, notwithstanding the obstacles of: age, mockery, shame, impossibility etc.

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