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**The Role of Literature Education in Curbing
Violence: A focus on John Pepper Clark's "The
Casualties"**

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Abstract

This paper centres on the role of Literature Education in curbing violence. It explores John Pepper Clark's "The Casualties" as an instrument of preaching peace. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the ongoing academic discourse on the issue of violence in the society. No one can say the exact cause of violence but the people's prayer is how it can be brought to an end. The researcher is of the view that moral education is the answer. One of the goals of Literature Education according to (Uwaifo 1979) is: to expose the learners through reading to varied valuable experience which may contribute to their emotional, social and moral judgment. A warning against violence is not only seen in the poem's subject matter but also seen in its tone and poetic devices.

Introduction

Education cannot easily be defined. This is because it is related to so many concepts. It is also a universal concept that differs from society to society. Education can be viewed as the ability to read, write and calculate. It can also be seen as a training one receives to enable him to be specialized or acquire skills needed in certain fields. According to Childs (1956) no education is adequate without the inculcation of morals. This implies that any educated man without sound moral is not yet educated. If one has moral education, he can live with others in the society because “no man is an island”, goes a popular saying.

In our society today, we see a lot of violence and crises. Africa, which needs development, has abandoned its growth in treating crisis and war relating issues. This in effect is affecting the society as we experience loss of human and material resources, disruption of peace and economic activities. In all these destructions, we see the involvement of human beings. Then, how can human beings be involved in destroying their society? Where is the place of education in the life of human beings?

This is the point where literature education comes in. Ugwu (2002) defines literature “as any work of writing that has an educating value and of universal interest touching on themes such as religion, government romance, politics and science” (p. 1). Literature makes use of language, form and imagination as special tools.

Literature is an important school subject. The goals of teaching Literature in English according to Uwaifo (1979) should be:

1. To help students appreciate their own culture and that of others.
2. To develop the reader’s creative ability.
3. To develop the ability to think critically leading to adequate judgment.

4. To help the learning of language in which the literary work is composed.
5. To inculcate in learner through interesting reading, the love for extensive and continued pleasurable reading for its own sake.
6. To expose the learners through reading to varied valuable experience; this may contribute to their emotional, social and moral judgment.

The goals reveal that Literature has a lot of cognitive and affective training for the learner. John Pepper Clark’s “The casualties” is an example of a poem that teaches that violence should be avoided. This is because war/violence favours no one. The teaching of this poem is a teaching of moral instruction and this is needed to curb violence in our society today. If the teaching of this poem could be used to preach peace, agree with me that Literature Education is an instrument of curbing violence in the society.

The Concept of Literature

Literature is the art of composition in prose, drama and verse. It is the writing or study of a whole body of literary composition — drama, fiction, essays, poetry and biography. In fact, literature is any imaginative work of art which uses language, plot, character, setting and so on, to give us a picture of life. When we talk about literature in this sense, what we normally have in mind is that artistic creative compositions which represents the emotions, feelings and thoughts of a person.

Literature springs from our inborn love of telling a story, or arranging words in pleasing pattern, of expressing in words some special of our human experience. The primary aim of literature is to give pleasure, enjoyment and literary experience to the readers. Writers of Literature are not tied down to facts as histograms, economist or scientists whose study are based absolutely on what actually happened in the word of reality. This means that Literature aims at creativity using words and styles as its special tools.

The term literature is derived from the Latin word “litera” meaning “an individual written character (letter)” (retrieved on 20th March, 2013 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wikiliterature/introduction>). Literarily, literature is acquaintance with letters and could mean different things to different people depending on how it is used. Therefore, Literature requires a working definition and it could be worthwhile to say that it does not just refer to anything in print. Traditionally, it means poetry fiction, drama, myth, folklore, biography essay, autobiography among others. An interesting definition of Literature is that given by the Muslim scientist and philosopher Iman Ja’afar Al-sadia who defines Literature “as a garment which one puts on what he says or writes so that it may appear more attractive”.

It can broadly be defined as a body of artistic compositions or writings which expresses the life-style or culture of a people in an acceptable and beautiful language. This definition focuses on the three major notion of Literature. It is artistic, consciously composed, it is culture bound especially on a people’s way of living and its language is standard and is embellished with beauty. It can simply be defined as the art of creative writing and a mode of expression which portrays the way of life of a people through creative writing.

Literature is language in use in real life situations. It expresses the hopes, fears, doubts, joys, love, problems and conflicts that human beings experience in everyday life activities which are written down. It is language in action which exploits the resources of the time, and place in which it is written. It also involves the continued reflection of human life and all the complexities and conflicts which vary from situation to situation and from individual to individual. There are three genres of literature. They are: prose, drama and poetry.

“The Casualties” by John Pepper Clark

The casualties are not only those who are dead;
They are well out of it.
The casualties are not only those who are wounded,
Though they await burial by installment.
The casualties are not only those who have lost
Persons or property, hard as it is
To grope for a touch that some
May not know is not there.
The casualties are not only those led away by night;
The cell is a cruel place, sometimes a haven,
No where as absolute as the grave.
The casualties are not only those who started
A fire and now cannot put it out. Thousands
Are burning that have no say in the matter.
The casualties are not those who escaping
The scattered shell become prisoners in
A fortress of falling walls.

The casualties are many, and a good number well
Outside the scenes of ravage and wreck;
They are the emissaries of rift,
So smug in smoke-rooms they haunt abroad,
They do not see the funeral piles
At home eating up the forests.
They are wandering minstrels who, beating on
The drums of the human heart, draw the world
Into a dance with rites it does not know

The drums overwhelm the guns.
Caught in the clash of counter claims and charges
When not in the niche other have left,
We fall.
All casualties of the war,

Because we cannot hear each other speak,
Because eyes have ceased to see the face from the crowd,
Because whether we know or
Do not know the extent of wrong on all sides,
We are characters now other than before
The war began, the stay-at-home unsettled

By taxes and rumours, the looters for office
And wares, fearful every day the owners may return,
We all are casualties,
All sagging as are
The cases celebrated for kwashiorkor,
The unforeseen camp-follower of not just our war.

The Message of the Poem

The background of the poem is the civil crisis and the sequent three-year civil war in Nigeria of 1967-1970. The war, which affected the nation, was fought between the Federal troops and those of the Biafran. This is as a result of the Biafran's declaration of seceding from the federation. The poem records the general effect of the war on the entire nation.

Thus, the poem is a cry on the destruction and unrest citizens experienced as a result of the nation's civil war of 1967-1970. It is also a message to all that war or violence must be avoided. Clark's attitude to war was not hidden; it brings losses and destruction. He joins his fellow poet Wilfred Owen who always writes "My subject is War and the Pity of War". In this poem, Clark attacks the futility of war, and the unnecessary loss of both human beings and materials.

Right from the onset, the poet enumerates the different groups of persons affected by the violence. They are: "Those who are dead" (line 1, "those who are wounded" (line 3) "those who have lost persons or property" (lines 5 & 6), "those led away by night" (line 9). The list includes "those who started the fire and now cannot put it out" (lines 12 and 13) and "those who escaping the sheltered shell become

prisoners" (15 and 16). The simple truth is that the casualties "are not only those listed above".

The poet goes further to state that "the casualties are many, and a good number well" (lines 18 & 19). "The emissaries of rift, so smug in smoke-rooms they haunt abroad" (lines 20 & 21) are also in his list. The people are residents of places other than the country identify with the crisis and advance its cause through propaganda and involving others in the matter.

However, to paint the ugly situation involved in war, the poet includes every citizen as victims of war. This is seen in lines 27 – 37. In these lines the losses in war are said to be the business of everyone. The poet spares no one including those who know or do not know that they are affected in one way or the other. He states "We fall casualties of the war" lines (30 and 31). This is because everybody is affected in the war. War is a field of pain as it affects both young and old, rich and poor, man and woman, high and low, among others.

This poem is more than a warning note to all of us because war is ugly and should be avoided. This is because "we cannot hear each other speak", as seen in line 32. This shows an atmosphere of enmity and unfriendliness. If brothers do not "hear each other speak", it means that they are out to kill or hurt one another. Another provoking line is that we are all casualties of the war, "because eyes have ceased to see the face from the crowd" (line 33). This also indicates that we do not wish one another goodwill because of the outcome of the war. Other striking lines are: "Because whether we know or". Do not know the extent of wrong on all sides (line 34 & 35) "we are characters now other than before" (line 36) we can see from the lines above that war is terrible. War makes brothers enemies, thus causing pains and agonies to "all sides". The poet systematically used "all sides" to show the reader that no one should partake in war. The wrongs done during war cannot be measured thus "we know or do not know the extent of wrong on all sides" (lines 34 and 35). War leads to everlasting and long life enmity because the effects will make the opponents angry that they will want to revenge all the time. Being

“Characters now other than before” (line 36) is worthy to note. This means that war spoils good relationships. This causes people to live a separate life “other than before” (line 36). This is the reason why Christians live separate from Muslims in Jos today that is after the crises encountered in the city. During war, people do not observe their normal business and routine as the “stay at home unsettled” (line 37). The poet believes that war is an attack on humanity and needs to be avoided.

In the concluding segment of the poem, the poet identifies other negative sides of war. In lines 38 – 43, the poet shows that war produces criminals who loot people’s property. It makes the increase of taxes necessary in order to re-build the society. It makes rumours to become the order of the day. This is seen in line 38 as the poet rightly puts it “By taxes and rumors, the looters for office”. Those who become rich as a result of stealing people’s properties are not free because they do not have peace of mind. They use what they did not work for and so do not enjoy them because they are “fearful every day the owners may return” (line 39). This shows that war is notorious for inflicting psychological and emotional injuries on its victims. The poet concludes by saying those who are psychologically traumatized are not different from the psychologically affected. Although they are like the “cases celebrated for kwashiokor” (line 42), “the unforeseen camp-follower of not just our war” (line 43) are casualties of war.

Poetic Devices

1. Anaphora: This is a device that makes use of conscious repetition of pattern. It is a sound device.

Examples:

The casualties are not only those who are dead; (line 1)
The casualties are not only those who are wounded (line 3)
The casualties are not only led away by night; (line 9)
This device is used to exempt no one as casualty of the war.

2. Alliteration: This involves the repetition of similar consonant sounds in a line of poem. Examples:

A fortress of falling walls (line 17)

So smg in smoke rooms (line 21)

Caught in the clash of counter claims (line 28)

As a sound device, alliteration is used to bring out the musical effects in the poem.

3. Repetition: In this device, a word or phrase is written more than once in a piece of writing it is used for the sake of emphasis.

Examples

They are the emissaries of right (line 20)

They do not see the funeral piles (line 22)

They are wandering minstrels (line 24)

Because we cannot hear, each other speak (line 32)

Because eyes have ceased to see (line 33)

Because whether are know or (line 34)

In the above examples “They” and “because” are repeated for emphasis. “They” is used to show who the casualties are while “Because” is used to buttress the poet’s point on the effect of war.

4. Imagery: Imagery is the use of words to evoke mental pictures in the reader. They are the words that appeal to over senses of sight, feeling, taste, smell etc.

Examples

Those who are dead (line 1)

Those who are wounded (line 3)

Property (line 6),

A fire (line 13)

Thousands are burning (lines 13 and 14)

A fortress of falling walls (line 17)

The drums (lines 25 and 27)

The looters for office (line 38)

Kwashiorkor (line 42)

The words above paints a negative image of war and make the poem concrete and familiar to the reader.

5. Simile: Simile is derived from the word “similar” which shows similarities between persons or objects being compared. It is used to compare things, persons, objects or situations because of certain qualities common to them, although they may be different in other areas. It uses “as” or “like” in making its comparison.

Examples

Nowhere as absolute as the grave (line 11)

All saging as are

The cases celebrated for kwashiorkor (lines 41 and 42)

The above device is used to bring out the qualities of “grave” and “kwashiorkor”.

6. Oxymoron: In oxymoron, two words or phrases of opposite or contrasting meanings are juxtaposed (placed together) for rhetorical effect. Example:

Fortress of falling walls (line 17)

The device helps to show that war is terrible and its effects are shocking in nature.

7. Personification: In personification, objects or abstract ideas are given human attributes. Examples:

The drums of human heart, draw the word (line 25)

The guns.... (line 26)

Caught in the clash of counter claims and charges (line 28)

The cases celebrated for kwashiorkor (line 42)

In the above examples, drums, guns and kwashiorkor are made to appear like human being because human attributes are ascribed to them. They are used to beautify the poem.

8. Synecdoche: In synecdoche, a part of a person or thing is made to stand for a whole or the whole is made to stand for a part.

Examples

Because eyes have ceased to see the faces in the crowd (line 33)

In the above line, “eyes” and “faces” are used to refer to human being that is the victims of war.

Conclusion

During crisis, the assumption is that only the dead, the injured and those who lose their property are the victims. This assumption has contributed to the reason why war will not end in the world. The poet re-examines this assumption with a view to educating the reader who the victims of war are. His detailed explanation of involvement reveals that “We are all casualties”. This means that no one is exempted from his list, it includes those who suffered both physical and psychological injuries and losses. The poem is a warning to everybody and is necessary in this present time when war has become the order of the day. The researcher therefore uses the poem to preach peace to all and sundry.

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