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Patriarchy vs Feminism: The Dialectics of Social Norms, Gender, and Character Delineation in Selected Anglophone African Fiction

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Abstract

African societies are predominantly patriarchal. It is also a fact that the earliest writers of Anglophone African fiction were men. Since the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart*—credited as the first African novel—in 1958 (Killam, 1969), a discernible pattern has emerged in which most male writers, by centralizing male characters, tend to tilt towards patriarchal ideals. In response to this narrative, new female voices have arisen to write women into relevance. This paper interrogates these trends and their implications for literary scholarship. The four novels selected for study are representational, and they are: Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* (2005), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dream Count* (2025). The research methodology is qualitative, examining the first two novels for patriarchal bias in character delineation, while the other two are analyzed by highlighting efforts at writing back by female writers. Social realism theory (1862) and Judith Butler's performative feminism theory (1990) serve as the analytical tools for the research. The paper demonstrates that most male writers project male characters and marginalize female ones, while female writers, in an effort to change the trajectory, produce 'protest' fiction that relegates men to the background. Ultimately, the paper argues that both patriarchal depictions and the consequent feminist "writing back" phenomenon expose biased perspectives that appear to present most African fiction by writers of English expression as lopsided.

Keywords: patriarchy, gender representation, characterization, realism, feminism

Introduction

The African society, like other societies around the world, has never been short of men and women achievers who perform their respective functions in the development of society. The projection of men as central characters and relegation of women to peripheral roles have been observed in most of the Anglophone African fiction this researcher has studied. It is also observed that this tendency is what appears to have triggered reactions from female writers who, in their efforts to flip the coin and change the narrative, commit what could amount to the same anomaly for which male writers are often accused.

The four novels randomly chosen for this study are: *Arrow of God* (*AOG*), *A Grain of Wheat* (*AGOW*), *House of Symbols* (*HOS*), and *Dream Count* (*DC*). The novels expose a pattern of gender bias that tends to obscure the beauty of realism and plausibility as far as African fiction is concerned. The choice of the four novels is because they span the period from the earliest African fiction to the present day.

Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, a novel set in the colonial era of Nigeria, is about Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu deity in Umuaro traditional community. In his obstinacy, he procrastinates to announce the commencement of the harvest that should usher in a new season, citing the non-appearance of the moon. His stubbornness is his tragic flaw, which leads to his fall. Because Ezeulu is cast in the mould of the classical tragic hero, his fall leads to monumental calamity for his community.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* is set in the fictional Kenyan community of Thabai and centres on the people's preparations for independence. As they take stock, the central character, Mugo, is caught in the web of a dilemma that leads him to question the people's perception of him as one of the two heroes of the struggle alongside Kihika, another male character.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* celebrates the protagonist, Eaglewoman, and her strength of character, which leads her to succeed in her home, social, and political life. She achieves success despite the challenges posed by patriarchal and social conditioning. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dream Count* tells the stories of four women: Chiamaka, Zikora, Kadiatou, and Omelogor. Each is accomplished professionally, but their coming-of-age experiences in love and relationships lead to varying levels of disillusionment.

The four novels are compartmentalized to reflect the gender slant, and the research methodology involves in-text qualitative analyses and explication. The novels are also critically evaluated by deploying social realism theory and Judith Butler's performative

feminism to interrogate their conformity or non-conformity with the notion of literature as a "representation of life" or "an expression of society" (Wellek & Warren, 1969, pp. 94–95).

Social realism, as an offshoot of the sociological approach to literature, emerged in the 19th century as a literary movement that depicted the realities of everyday life. Exponents like Wellek and Warren postulate that works of literature can be regarded as "social documents, as assumed pictures of social reality" (1969, p. 102). Social realism emphasizes the writer's fidelity to reality, and a major means of achieving this is character delineation, because characters are the everyday people who populate the writer's narrative. Also, characters are the vehicle by which realistic fiction depicts "life accurately and truthfully, focusing on the everyday experiences of ordinary people without embellishment" (Biscontini, 2024, Para. 1). The second theory, performative feminism, as propounded by Butler (1990), highlights gender performance rather than fixed or stereotyped portrayal of women as found in some literary works. Performative feminism, as a variant of feminism, serves the purpose of this paper by evoking gender roles as dynamic and performative. Butler affirms that "gender is not something that one is. It is something one does, an act. A 'doing' rather than a 'being.'" (1990, p. 34). This means that a woman should not be evaluated on the basis of her gender. Rather, her performance, achievements and contributions to social development should define her.

Related Scholarship

Arrow of God, *A Grain of Wheat*, and *House of Symbols* have received a gamut of critical evaluations, but *Dream Count* is too recent to have received significant reviews.

Ugwu (2014) examines *Arrow of God* against the background of the novel's trans-cultural relevance to the overall theme of cultural conflict. The work alludes to the novel's "propensity to conform with Aristotle's definition of tragedy as an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and is of a certain magnitude" (Ugwu, 2014, p. 273). The scholar's assessment is germane, as the novel features a protagonist portrayed as larger than life whose pride leads to his fall, just as the classical heroes in Aristotle's canons do.

Another scholar, Amechi Akwanya writes about *Arrow of God* as "a harrowing story of traumatic change in which a traditional society loses its cultural identity under pressures—internal and external" (Akwanya, 2013, p. 35). Akwanya further states that the loss of identity was inevitable as the tribal life of the Umuaro community buckled in the wake of what he describes as colonial meddling, the protagonist's flaw, obstinacy, and his indecision. This double-barreled "arsenal" constituted a strong force that worked against the traditional society, which was already infiltrated by powerful external forces.

Mambrol (2022) reflects on *A Grain of Wheat* and the "poisonous memories of jealousy, mean-spiritedness, betrayal and disillusionment which confront the major characters of the novel on the eve of the country's independence" (para 2). Mambrol (2022) submits that the characters' struggles to re-build their lives amount to "late pursuit of ill-defined justice" (para 2). Despite this assessment, Mugo, the novel's protagonist, under the weight of his betrayal, confesses his guilt to avoid a more dire consequence, such as rejection by the people. Although Ngugi portrays Mugo as a hermit, he is still ostracized.

Kumar (2019) examines *A Grain of Wheat* from the perspective of the two revolutionary movements captured in the novel—the Mau Mau revolt and the eight years of pre-emergency insurgency. Kumar highlights the socio-cultural and ethnic disintegration of the Gikuyu (Kenyan) society following the domineering presence of Western imperialist forces and the attempt by the people to uphold their identity and language. He believes that the elements of identity and language provide a common basis for people's "shared emotions and sentiments" (Kumar, 2019, p. 272). The critic's position lies at the heart of the changes in Kenyan society Ngugi depicts in the novel.

Worguji (2014) interrogates the male child obsession in the African society in *House of Symbols* and how the phenomenon leads women to give birth to multiple unplanned children in their search for a male child and heir to the family fortunes. The critic's assessment reflects the dictates of patriarchy and its tendency to place greater value on the male child to the disadvantage of the female offspring. This forms part of the major concern for feminist writers who argue that such a stance should not be promoted by African writers, who have a responsibility to draw attention to the injustice of gender bias in order to influence social change.

Pointing out attempts to counter patriarchal bias, Burtner (2025) argues that Adichie's *Dream Count* stands in opposition to the valorization of men. Instead, men and their foibles are a major focus of the novel. She contends that the novel exposes the ways in which many men abdicate their responsibilities. Burtner also describes the novel's structure as creating "gaps that ultimately left expectations unfulfilled" (2025, para 1). This present study, however, maintains that what Burtner (2025) regards as a weakness is, in fact, part of the novel's strength and symbolizes the checkered experiences of the four young women around whom the narrative revolves.

Further research reveals some similarity with the present work in the studies of Okolocha (2022) and Oso (2018). Okolocha (2022, p. 373) examines the stereotypical and traditional images of women in Nigerian literature written by men and the dominant feminist

ideologies propagated by women writers. She highlights the subordination of women and the efforts by female writers to counter the portraiture of women as inferior to men.

On his part, Oso (2018, p. 256) writes about the relegation of women in the male-authored African novels noting that in response to this proclivity, many female African novelists have exposed the patriarchal nature of African society in their novels. He further argues that female writers "deliberately demonized and bestialized the male characters in their novels to get even" (Oso, 2018, p. 256). While this latter view seems somewhat extreme, Okolocha (2022) and Oso's (2018) positions on what could be termed "male for male" and "female for female" trends remain germane. Although their arguments validate the concerns of this research, what distinguishes this study is its focus on the implications of these trends, such as the erosion of the fundamental philosophy of literature, which is to present life realistically as it is (Wellek & Warren, 1949, p. 94). The African society comprises strong men and women across all ages and seasons, and that reality should not be buried in the grave of the parochialisms projected by fiction writers.

This study also distinguishes itself by illuminating what the actions of African fiction writers portend for literary scholarship. This dialectical approach, therefore, is a critique of the dichotomy between the valorization of men and the denigration of women and of the projection of women and the marginalization of men by Anglophone fiction writers.

Patriarchy, Valorizing Men and Denigrating Women

Patriarchy is a social structure that emphasizes the supremacy of males, especially fathers, within a family. African fiction has long reflected this ideology, as male writers frequently construct heroic male protagonists at the expense of female characters. In Chinua Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the central character, Okonkwo, is portrayed as a larger-than-life character who "breathed heavily and it was said that, when he slept, his wives and children in their houses could hear him breathe" (Achebe, 1958, p. 4). Achebe sustains this emphasis on dominant males and subordinate females in his third novel, *Arrow of God*. Its protagonist, Ezeulu, the chief priest of the Ulu deity in Umuaro, wields such immense authority that when he "considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people, he wondered if it was real" (Achebe, 1964, p. 3).

Ezeulu is exalted, like a demigod, cast in the mold of the classical hero—powerful and endowed with almost absolute powers. His authority is so overwhelming that even he questions its reality. Like Mugo in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, Ezeulu is valorized despite the imperfections that the narrative gradually reveals.

> Mugo's name was whispered from ear to ear. Mysterious stories about him spread among the market women. This would not have happened on an ordinary market day. But this was not just another day. Tonight Kenya would get Uhuru. And Mugo, our village hero, was no ordinary man. Wambui put it in his way: Independence Day without him would be stale; he is Kihika born again. (Wa Thiong'o, 1967, p. 195)

The image of Mugo as a superman, projected by the novelist in the excerpt above, is subtly reinforced by the reference to "market women"—a term often used to denigrate women within the African cultural contexts. A second male character, Kihika, is also similarly eulogized: "women sang for Kihika and Mugo, the two heroes of deliverance from our village" (Wa Thiong'o, 1967, p. 221). These portrayals reflect a tendency to elevate men as central figures while relegating women to bystander or cheerleader roles. By portraying Mugo and Kihika as the "two heroes of deliverance," the text implicitly suggests that women did not participate meaningfully in the community's major activities or contribute in ways that would make an impact, thereby earning them the status of heroes. Indeed, the two novels examined in this section of the paper consistently portray women as weak, docile, and ineffective. They are frequently grouped with children:

> "And I say which Ezeulu? Or don't you know who you are looking for?" The four other men in the hut said nothing. Women and children thronged the door leading from the hut into the inner compound. There was fear and anxiety in their faces - - -. "What does he look like?" asked the corpral. "He is tall as the iroko tree and his skin is white like the sun." (Achebe, 1964, p. 153)

In the above passage, the men are depicted as stoic and composed, while the women, like the children with them, give in to emotions of fear, with "anxiety in their faces," further diminishing women's agency and significance. On the other hand, Ezeulu is described as "tall as the iroko tree" to paint an awe-inspiring picture in the reader's mind.

In reality, when faced with uncertainty, such as the fearsome moment when policemen arrive to arrest Ezeulu, "baring all their weapons at once" (Achebe, 1964, p. 152), the reactions of those present are not likely to be based on gender. It is this rigid portrayal of women as easily shaken that feminist theorist Judith Butler critiques. She argues that women are not static beings and should not be depicted in literature as robotic or emotionally predictable.

The events narrated in *Arrow of God* and *A Grain of Wheat* depict communities under stress, grappling with imminent social and political changes. Such circumstances call for collective action, with all members of the community contributing to peaceful social transformations. However, the authors of the two novels appear to re-inforce patriarchal

norms by predominantly featuring men in discussions and actions that shape these transitions. In contrast, women are portrayed primarily as wives or daughters, confined to domestic spaces, whose roles are limited to celebrating male achievements or enduring subjugation without objection or voice.

Achebe illustrates a scene during one of the festival days, recounting:

> As Obika and Ofoedu drank with the three men at the market place, one of the men had thrown a challenge to them. The conversation had turned on the amount of palm wine a good drinker could take without losing knowledge of himself.
>
> "It depends on the palm tree and the tapper" said one of the men.
> "Yes agreed his friend, Maduka. It depends on the tree and the man who taps it."
> "That is not so. It depends on the man who drinks…" (Achebe, 1964, pp. 77–78)

The village festival is centered entirely around men, as if women do not exist. One might ask: could it be said that women did not participate in the communal festival, or are they deemed irrelevant? The writer's silence on the roles of women during such an important communal activity suggests a lack of regard for their presence and contributions. Achebe does not see the need to balance the representation of men and women in such an important community festival, reflecting a patriarchal worldview that dismisses the social and political relevance of women. This omission undermines the ideal of inclusivity. Fundamentally, it reveals a failure to present literature as a mirror of life—one that reflects an equitable and just society. Instead, the narrative reinforces gendered hierarchies that marginalize women's voices and capacities, thus making "social inequities and imbalances of power public knowledge" (Dobie, 2012, p. 93).

A similar pattern emerges in *A Grain of Wheat* where only men sit to take stock on the eve of Thabai's independence, in a fictionalized Kenyan society. It is the men who are portrayed as preoccupied with the issues surrounding the arrival of "Uhuru." Women, by contrast, are mentioned only in passing, typically as sisters, girlfriends or wives of the central male characters. Their roles are confined to those of spies or caretakers, supporting the men engaged in the actual struggle for freedom. Ngugi appears to set the tone for the exclusion of women from leadership roles when the narrator of the novel derisively recounts the events leading to the overthrow of women's leadership:

> Nevertheless, his words about a woman on the throne echoed something in the heart, deep down in their history. It was many, many years ago. Then women ruled the land of the Agikuyu. Men had no property, they were only there to serve the whims and needs

> of the women. Those were hard years. So they waited for women to go to war, they plotted a revolt…. They would sleep with all the women at ones, for didn't they know the heroines would return hungry for love and relaxation? Fate did the rest; women were pregnant; the takeover met with little resistance. (Wa Thiong'o, 1967, pp. 11–12)

The extract above denigrates women, portraying them as too effeminate to be entrusted with leadership. They are further ridiculed as love-struck and irrational, while the author uses a natural phenomenon—pregnancy—as a vehicle for negative social commentary. This imbalance is even more pronounced when viewed against the backdrop of male authors' influence on a social system that elevates men to positions of superior power and intellect. The denigration of women is further evident in the lines:

> years later, a woman became a leader…. She was beautiful. At dances, she swung her round hips this way, that way… men were moved by the power of a woman's naked body…. She too knew this was the end…. She was removed from the throne. (Wa Thiong'o, 1967, p. 12)

The passage trivializes female leadership by reducing it to a physical allure. The subordination of women is reflected in the narrator's statements in *Arrow of God*, particularly in moments of tension caused by Ezeulu's obstinate decisions. When his daughter questions his judgment in sending one of his sons to join the new religion, Ezeulu retorts: "Shut your mouth," indicating that he will not permit anyone, least of all his daughter, to challenge his authority or question his wisdom (Achebe, 1964, p. 43).

As the crisis escalates, and he is being led away by armed men from the white man, the "women and children followed fearfully at a good distance" while "Oduche's mother began to cry, and the other women joined her" (Achebe, 1964, p. 45). This portrayal of women as weak is juxtaposed with the novel's strong, heroic male characters. Based on this researcher's analyses of the two Anglophone African novels in question, the writer's role in offering an unflinching portrayal of society falls short. In response to the dominant patriarchal lens of male novelists, female writers such as Adimora-Ezeigbo and Adichie are actively reclaiming narrative space and giving women their own voices.

Feminism, Changing the Trajectory, Writing Women into Relevance

Feminism in literature expresses gender concerns and seeks to project women's roles and rights. As established in the preceding sections of this paper, Anglophone male African fiction writers have historically centered men in their narratives, relegating women to the margins of social experience. Palmer captures this dynamic succinctly when he writes:

> The presentation of women in the African novel has been left almost entirely to male-voices—Achebe, Amadi, Ngugi, Ousmane Sembene, Laye, Beti, Armah and Soyinka—and their interest in African womenhood, even in the case of Ousmane Sembene has had to take second place to numerous other concerns. These male novelists, who have presented the African woman largely, within the traditional milieu, have generally communicated a picture of a male-dominated and male-oriented society and the satisfaction of the women with this state of things has been, with the possible exception of Ousmane Sembene, completely taken for granted. Achebe, Ngugi and others have portrayed women who complacently continue to fulfil the roles expected of them by their society and to accept the superiority of the men. (1983, p. 38)

Emerging female writers are now challenging the "man-made world" created by male writers. This re-awakening has led to a deliberate emphasis on the female perspective in character development. Crucially, this perspective is no longer one of lamentation, but of assertive, self-confident women.

House of Symbols and *Dream Count*, selected for this analysis, elucidate vividly the efforts of Adimora-Ezeigbo and Adichie to write women into relevance. First, the protagonists in both novels, as is typical of the novels of other Anglophone female authors studied by this researcher so far, are women. Second, these central characters are accomplished professionals. For example, Eaglewoman, the protagonist of *House of Symbols*, is depicted as the quintessential modern woman: a wife, mother, businesswoman, and politician who blends philanthropy with her responsibilities, making her a valued member of her fictional Umuga community in Eastern Nigeria:

> But there is a lot that can be said about Eaglewoman's relationship with people, those who work with her or for her, with those who are her friends, her relations and even her business rivals. She knows how to give and enjoys giving relationships and other things what she herself has come to describe as a personal touch. Eaglewoman is a solid rock that gathers moss. Around her, green and yellow moss blossom in a thick furry mass at all seasons. (2005, pp. 108–109)

This excerpt paints a portrait of an ideal human being, admired and loved by her community for her admirable performance in multiple roles. Described as "a solid rock that gathers moss," Eaglewoman stands in stark contrast to the weak and timid female characters often depicted by male writers. She is self-actualized and evaluated by society based on her dynamic contributions—not as a robot controlled by her husband. Butler (1990) challenges the stereotypical portrayal of women and advocates for more nuanced representations.

The same strength of character, attributed to Adimora-Ezeigbo's heroine, is evident in the four central characters of Adichie's *Dream Count*. One of the two homodiegetic narrators, Chiamaka, speaks of her cousin, Omelogor, in such glowing terms to Darnell, her boyfriend:

> Only two years older but she had always hovered vigilantly, ready to jump in and protect me from myself. I told Darnell how brilliant and fearless she was, gleaming wherever she went, a star from birth doing starry things as a banker in Abuja.
>
> 'You talk about her like a myth',
> Darnell said.
> 'I do?'
> 'Yep. Like she can do no wrong.' (2025, p. 28)

The passage above clearly depicts the female character as fearless, assertive and purposeful. Indeed, the central female characters in *Dream Count* are portrayed as resilient and dynamic. This is an intentional departure from the traditional portrayal of women as vulnerable and submissive in male-authored novels. This aligns with Butler's (1990) stance that gender is not about what one is, but what one can do.

It is through the examination of the complexities that Chiamaka recounts in *Dream Count* her emotionally fraught relationship with Darnell, whom she characterizes as cold and arrogant. Though she endures his cold, denigrating attitude towards her for a while, eventually, she takes the bold step to reclaim her dignity by ending the relationship. She narrates:

> He locked the door to fend me off, to keep away this person darkly guilty of ordering a mimosa in Paris. I slept on the thin sofa and awoke early in a kind of gold light. While he silently made coffee, I looked online for flight tickets to Washington, DC.
>
> I sent Omelogor a message to say I was leaving Paris today and it was over. Her response was *love you. Call once in Paris.* It was done. telling Omelogor made it real, and I heard in my head the sound of the breaking spells. (2025, p. 57)

Darnell's rebuke over Chiamaka's choice of 'mimosa' during a dinner date is emblematic of his condescending attitude. Her decision to leave him is not merely personal—it symbolizes a broader feminist assertion of dignity and autonomy. The phrase "sound of the breaking spells" resonates both personally and generically, signifying the breaking of emotional dependency and, in the broader sense, the dismantling of patriarchal expectations. Such decisive action is rarely depicted in male-authored fiction, where women often endure abuse due to societal expectations of complacency.

In *House of Symbols*, Adimora-Ezeigbo's protagonist, Eaglewoman, exemplifies this affirmative agency. Despite her husband, Osai's, reservations, she fully immerses herself in business and politics. She is portrayed not as a subordinate, but as the dominant partner in their marriage. In one scene, the couple visits a friend in need:

> Eaglewoman turns to Osai and sees that he too has turned to look at her in that peculiar way they are able to speak to each other, to communicate without words. The eye contact lasts only a moment, but it is time enough for them to reach a decision and to cast a lot choosing who should speak their minds. The lot falls on Eaglewoman to announce their decision. (2005, p. 286)

The excerpt reveals a strong bond and mutual respect between the couple. The woman is not treated as inferior; rather, she is a decision-maker, a partner, and a leader. The depiction of deep respect and emotional intelligence between Eaglewoman and Osai challenges patriarchal norms that reduce women to appendages of men and advocates for change.

Furthermore, *House of Symbols* debunks the myth of compulsory betrothal. Aziagba, Eaglewoman's mother, supports her daughter's decision to reject a childhood betrothal to Nathaniel Okeke despite economic hardship. Okeke was in a position to provide for them. The narrator recounts:

> Even as a child she understood her mother's dilemma, her plight. Her worry over the bride price and other conjugal accessories splashed on the family by Nathaniel Okeke was real - - -. Osai made history by paying back everything. The things that could be returned were sent back. The rest were redeemed with a lot of money. (2005, p. 7)

The underlying message in the narrative above is a woman's right to choose her husband and to love. Also, this act of restitution is symbolic—it represents a rejection of transactional marriage and a reclaiming of female autonomy. Eaglewoman's story, like Chiamaka's, is a testament to the evolving literary landscape where women are no longer passive figures but active agents of change.

In the same vein, the women in *Dream Count* are independent, assertive, and actively participatory in shaping their lives. They are not passive observers of societal events, as women are often depicted in the novels of Achebe and Ngugi discussed in this study. Zikora in *Dream Count* experiences a sense of self-actualization, yet her lover, "could not understand that she might not want to be unemployed or that she, too, needed to do things in the world, to own things for herself" (2025, p. 106).

The depiction of educated, independent, and proactive women reflects a deliberate shift in female authors' narrative perspective. It asserts that the average woman is not inherently dependent on a man, but rather capable of autonomy and self-determination. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990) is particularly relevant here, as these characters challenge traditional gender roles through their actions and choices. Equally significant is the theme of mutual dependence between men and women, and the imperative of change, for Ezeigbo affirms that: "change is gradually but steadily taking place in this country and everywhere. Women are aware of this change and are capitalizing on it" (Ezeigbo, 1996, p. 76). This concept promotes a vision of gender relations rooted not in hierarchy, but in balance and reciprocity.

Conclusion

This study has examined Anglophone African fiction from the perspectives of male and female writers, each foregrounding their respective genders. The four novels selected span the period between 1959 and 2025, meaning that in approximately five decades, starting from the earliest novels, which reflect the colonial experience in the African countries of Nigeria and Kenya, to the present day, a pattern is discernible. That is, a pattern of male writers valorizing men and denigrating women, while female writers resort to changing their "circumstance" by giving women a voice and platform to showcase their achievements through their fiction. This is because of their belief that the societies depicted have never been bereft of brave and assertive women who have successfully contributed their quota to social growth, in commerce, politics, and the family.

The above phenomenon warrants serious debate due to its implications for literary scholarship. This paper is expected to stimulate further critical examination of the seeming parochialism that is read into much African fiction. This is expedient, particularly from the perspective of social realism, to serve the essence of literature as "primarily an imitation of life" (Wellek & Warren, 1949, p. 109). Although Wellek and Warren (1949) argue further that literature is "no substitute for sociology or politics," it has its "own justification and aim" (p. 109). That aim is to present life as it is. Fiction writers—male and female—have a responsibility to reflect social reality in their works to drive social change. In this regard, social change that sees men and women dispassionately portrayed as they are, with their strengths and weaknesses, rather than how the system of patriarchy perceives them to be.

Moreover, literature, under which fiction falls, is a creation of society and mirrors society, the whole of society, not a part. Mirroring society requires fidelity to realism. Even though there are elements of imagination, the veracity or plausibility of actions or events portrayed

in the novel should not be questioned. This is because fiction or literature serves as a powerful tool for positively influencing society. If novelists are to be swayed to write in the promotion of patriarchy and feminism based on their genders, then their ability to creatively impact society may become limited and doubtful.

It is not in doubt that many fiction writers display gender bias in their delineation of characters. A most fundamental implication of the "male for male" and "female for female" phenomenon in the works examined is that the novels may not accurately portray life in the context of African experience, as literature is wont to do.

Finally, it is pertinent to point out that despite the issue of gender bias, the four novels stand out in African fiction for their skillful use of language to convey their respective thematic concerns. The authors' crafts are attained through the use of African proverbs, symbolism, and idiomatic expressions, in particular. The writers' art elevates the novels above mere documentation of history and experiences.

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