

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

Chinedu Nwadike

Spiritan University Nneochi, Abia State, Nigeria

chineduvango@gmail.com

+234 8061541068

Abstract

Research Objective: This study looks at how traditions arise in poetry to provide poets with theoretical and methodological resources for poetic art. Specific objectives were to: examine how some major poets and critics view the role of emotions in poetry, and establish how emotions can provide a valid interpretive framework between subjectivity and objectivity in poetry.

Methodology: A historico-critical approach and critical textual analysis of data acquired from selected poetry was adopted. The study also included contextual sociology in the course of exploring how emotional encounters between a poet and a topic or theme can effectively provide a new theoretical framework and a method called “emotionism”.

Findings: Through emotionism, the style, structure, vision and mission of a poem emerge in organic unity from a pulse during an encounter between a poet and a topic or theme unlike the familiar method of choosing topic and structure ahead of writing a poem; excellent poetry is one that affects as many of the five senses and the imagination as possible; its language draws both the more and the less educated into the world of poetry; “split-line assonance” is a significant development; and the subjective provides a valid path to the objective in poetic art.

Conclusion: Emotionist poems arise from deeply felt emotions and also stir such emotions in an audience. Emotionism is a significant contribution to literature.

Recommendation: Poets and critics should explore emotionism further because of its contributions to poetic art.

Key words: *Emotion, expressionism, impressionism, poetic style, subjectivism.*

Interpenetration between Literature and Society

Aristotle describes literature (drama) as *mimesis*, that is, “representation” (of action). All *mimetic* literature are imaginative explorations of human actions and events. This interpenetration between literature and society is seen in works that have helped transform societies. The closer a literary work is to the real world, the stronger the interpenetration and the more realistic the connection between fact and fiction.

However, literary narcissism is found in poems filled with flights of fantasy which make readers find it torturous keeping pace as the poet’s mind frolics with the absurd. Such works might win awards – but could be stowed away in golden bookshelves to gather silvery dust over bronzen time! This is not to say that excellent poems are only those that deliver ideas in simple ways. Poetic expressions that turn the imagination on its head are like spices to food but should not be used frivolously. An example of a poetic spice is Samuel T. Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” (as cited in *The Norton Anthology*, 2001, p. 1597) which says in line 35,

A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice

while lines 45-47 say,

That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!

The belief that society should speak through every work of literature places a burden on writers. Literature is not disconnected from society but the integrity of literary works does not depend on how much literature serves social interests like an ideological tool. Literature can synergize with other disciplines that explore the human reality such as politics, religion, sociology, and psychology.

The True Tests of Poetic Ingenuity

One major advantage of the interpenetration between literature and society is that a writer can never run out of themes but the selection of style and structure must be carefully done because a wrong choice impacts a work negatively. Diction (use of everyday or elitist language) is one such concern and as Onuigbo (2010, p. 21-33) says, “to many scholars, it was still agreed that just as no linguist can pretend for so long to be deaf to the poetic function of language, no literary critic can conveniently be indifferent to the linguistic methods of literary appreciation”.

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

The Romantic poet, William Wordsworth is among the major writers who argue that literary artists should be sensitive to social events and be more inclined to using simple language. In the “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” of 1802, Wordsworth (as cited in *The Norton Anthology*, 2001, p. 1438) says that people “who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers” would not appreciate his support for simple language. Wordsworth (as cited in *The Norton Anthology*, 2001, p. 1438) recounts that,

The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature; chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement.

Good poetry should never be equated with obscurantism as if the more abstract and difficult, the higher in excellence. A wrong impression like that can scare potential readers away. Frivolous use of absurdities and extreme expressions can be described as conceptual prodigality. There may be a difference between poems written in competition with other poets and poems written for the public. In the former, obscurantism can be a technique to confound fellow poets but for the latter, good poetry should draw the common man into the world of poesy rather than keep him out.

Poetry is not a random discourse but a structured expression of thought characterized by lyrical style, imaginative language, curated structure and imbued with vision and mission in relation to the poet and society, and which also impacts the imagination, the senses and the emotions of an audience in ways different from prose, drama, critical essay and normal speech. Vision is the future state of affairs desired while mission is the practical steps taken to achieve that vision. One benchmark for excellent poetry is the ability to affect as many of the five human senses and as much of the imagination as possible. The first true test of poetic ingenuity is: the more a poem impacts the imagination and the five sensory organs (eyes: visual, skin: tactile, tongue: gustatory, nose: olfactory, and ear: auditory), the higher its quality.

Poetic excellence, thus, lies in how much a poet can accomplish this imaginative and sensory function in poesy. This is because it is by means of these two functions that both the poet and the poem can affect as much of the human person (body and soul/mind) as possible. Good poetry is not only about exciting the minds of the audience but must also excite their senses through the power of well-crafted words. Well-crafted words activate the imagination and senses properly

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

and make people to see, feel, taste, smell and hear what is being described. This principle also applies to excellence in drama and prose. It is by the power of words that a good novelist can build a house in the imagination of a reader down to every detail and when a delicious meal is described with words, the reader should see, feel, taste, smell and hear that food in his imagination.

There arises from this the second true test of poetic excellence: competency in use of language, themes and styles that draw both the more and the less educated into the world of poetry. If only one group feels drawn, to that extent has the poet failed in poetic art. Some critics may argue that there can be excellent poetry in obscurantism and obscurantism in excellent poetry. However, such pundits must first clarify for us what they meant by *excellence*. Good poems have a pull whereas the taste of one bad poem can scare people from poetry. Truly, being a poet is both a calling and an identity which one must work hard every day to justify rather than assume after just writing a few poems. Indeed, "Greatness is a fault in a skyline of mediocrity" (Nwadike, 2008, p. 62) and, ironically, no poet can claim perfection in his or her lifetime. They all work to be better at a next poem.

It was the concern for excellence that made literary writers of ancient times call on the Muses for assistance. The nine Muses of ancient Greece who were considered the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne and taken as the goddesses of literature, science, and art were Clio, Thalia, Erato, Euterpe, Polyhymnia, Calliope, Terpsichore, Urania, and Melpomene. Many modern writers call on the Holy Spirit instead. Inspiration and ideas can come from a scenario as aesthetic as sitting under an umbrella tree in a well-kept lawn during a cool evening, or in low grass on a hill-top, some quietude, soft breeze caressing the skin, a stream flowing leisurely nearby, some shrubs in sight, birds chirping in flight or hopping around, and a few squirrels and lizards sprinting in short runs between trees. Writers who live in the hubbub of city life find inspiration some other way. Poetry can also be empowered from life experiences or from encountering other poems.

Social circumstances such as place of birth, quality of education, social opportunities and personal creative ingenuity influence literary productivity. It is on this basis that one can introduce a distinction between poets born with the art (those who grow up realizing they are naturally attracted to poesy) and poets who acquire the art through learning (education and practice). Nevertheless, poets born with the art also need a level of education and practice to sharpen it to full bloom.

Poets born with the art can, for want of a better term, be called natural poets while poets who acquired the art through learning can be called acquisitional poets. It should not be presumed that a natural poet would always be better at poetry than an acquisitional poet because if one has a natural gift but does not build it up to an excellent level, someone who did not have that gift can

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

through education and consistent practice acquire the skill and build it up to an excellent level. Similarly, doing a degree program in literature does not automatically make a student capable of writing interesting literary works. It only mostly equips him or her with knowledge about what a good literary work should look like and the many ways literary critics can approach the literary work. Only a small percentage of degree holders in literature actually get into writing works of poetry, prose, drama and works of literary criticism.

Emotionism as a Theoretical Framework, Method and Movement

Poets oftentimes access their emotions while writing poems but there has been no formal critical work that posits emotions as a valid path to objectivity in poetic art. What is more familiar is relegating emotions to subjectivity and uncertainty. For instance, Eliot (1982, p. 42) argues in a 1919 essay that, “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion” and that the “progress of an artist is ... a continual extinction of personality” (depersonalization) (p. 39).

However, emotion is part of personality and excellent poetry can be crafted from what can be called *emotionism*. Emotionism is the transformation of an emotional encounter with a topic or theme into lines of poetry (prose or drama) by means of well-crafted words, a proper structure, vision and mission in a way that also elicits such emotions in an audience. Emotions are let out as deeply as they are felt and as freely as they arise in relation to a topic or theme and this occurs in ways that activate the imagination and senses. Emotionism is, thus, a full theoretical framework, a method and a movement in literature.

Emotionism shares something in common with expressionism with respect to highlighting the emotive but also differs in a significant way. Expressionism was a literary movement that emerged in reaction to realism, naturalism and materialism and its objective was to de-emphasize or distort the objective in order to emphasize the subjective or anything psychological that affects the emotions. In the Middle Ages, certain trends in philosophy, literature, painting and architecture (for instance, the Baroque style) contributed to the emergence of early forms of expressionism. However, its modern form emerged in pre-World War I Germany (and Austria) between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and it was influenced by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and the art of Vincent Willem van Gogh. Other names associated with expressionism in modern literature include the novelists Franz Kafka and James Joyce, the playwrights August Strindberg, Frank Wedekind and Reinhard Johannes Sorge, and the poets Georg Heym, Ernst Stadler and Franz Werfel. Expressionism declined in the late 1920s especially under pressure from the Nazis.

Donahue (2005, p. ix) notes that, as a term, expressionism was extended to painting, architecture, sculpture and music. Willett (1970, p. 25) notes that Julien-Auguste Hervé was a painter who called some of his paintings at the exhibition in Paris in 1901 “Expressionismes”. There was

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

also, as Gordon (1987, p. 175) says, Antonin Matějček, a Czech art historian who coined the term “expressionism” in 1910 with a view to contrasting it with impressionism.

Impressionism was a movement in art that originated in the mid-nineteenth century France and which, according to Hauser (2005, p. 111), “forms the climax of the development in which recognition is given to the dynamic and organic elements of experience and which completely dissolves the static world-view of the Middle Ages”. Impressionism emerged from the paintings of Claude Monet but it was Louis Leroy who inadvertently coined the term in an article where he criticized Monet’s 1872 painting, *Impression, Sunrise*. Other major impressionist painters included Pierre Auguste Renoir, and Camille Pissarro. Impressionism was also associated with the symbolist movement in literature where words and imagery were given metaphorical meanings largely meant to evoke rather than describe particular states of mind. Notable impressionist literary writers included the Dutch Tachtigers (such as Willem Kloos, and Frederik van Eeden), Charles Pierre Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Jean Nicolas Arthur Rimbaud.

Impressionist art started declining in the 1880s due to emergent differences in technique, politics, location and financial statuses between the central artists. However, it later metamorphosed into post-impressionism (neo-impressionism) as seen in the paintings of Georges Seurat, Vincent van Gogh, and Pablo Picasso. Its decline in France (Europe) stimulated its rise in the United States through American painters who studied in France and the exhibitions and sale of French impressionist art in the United States in the late nineteenth century. Major American impressionist painters included Charles Curran, Theodore Robinson, Mary Cassatt, and John Singer Sargent. American impressionist art started declining after a major art exhibition called the Armoury Show organized in New York in 1913 where other modern painting techniques also came on display.

Emotionism contrasts with expressionism (and impressionism and symbolism, too) mainly because while expressionism rejects, distorts or devalues the objective so as to emphasize the subjective, emotionism rather explores the objective by means of the subjective. Emotionism gives sufficient attention to both the objective and the subjective and uncovers the connections between objective facts and subjective emotions proper to them. While William Wordsworth says in his “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” that “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity” (as cited in *The Norton Anthology*, 2001, p. 1447), poetry is not merely the crafting of poems from feelings and emotions or from a recollection of them but also the ability to convey and evoke similar emotions in an audience.

One may wonder how someone can use the subjective (emotive) to explore the objective and still consider the process valid. Anything that exists is taken to be so because there is a subjectivity to

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

whom the existence of that thing is objective. Thus, the subjective (emotive) is another valid path to the objective. When a woman loses consciousness of her house (maybe, due to a health condition), the house does not cease to exist or become non-objective but still exists objectively to others who experience it through their subjectivities. No aspect of human reality is without any connections to subjectivity.

An example of emotionism in poetry is Nwadike's "Growing Old," lines 49-54, which say,

We vote you to rule and you devote us to misrule,
Generations impoverished in lifetime while your unborn feed fat before time.
We go to sleep at night but those nightmares rouse us before light,
Awaking in a dear nation feeling like strangers in a police station.
National resources you divvy among the few in your privy,
The media say it's democracy but all we see is kleptocracy.

Here, one finds objective statements about socio-political corruption. The word "kleptocracy" was coined from kleptomania and democracy and refers to a state of governance where the rich steal from the poor by looting public funds. For the poet (Nwadike, 2008, p. 4), kleptomania is a psychiatric condition like the obsessive-compulsive disorders and people with such afflictions should be evacuated to psychiatric hospitals rather than allowed to remain in power. Kleptomania can also be a herd affliction affecting multinational corporations and countries that steal wherever they go. Indeed, wherever this form of kleptomania is properly defined and legally backed-up, kleptocracy will wither! This verse of poetry, thus, shows how a subjective emotional expression can validly explore a social issue in an objective manner.

What is remarkable about the verse quoted above ("Growing Old," lines 49-54) is that the words and sentences are packed with emotion: they emerge from deeply-felt emotions and are designed to convey and evoke similar emotions in an audience. Emotions evoked may sometimes be of opposite orientation such as when fear and guilt make corrupt rulers reject the emotional declamations of an activist poet. A poet can also craft lines of poetry to have emotive values different from the one he or she feels.

Emotionist poetry requires the proper choice of style and structure. The verse quoted above makes use of assonance (repetition of same or similar vowel sounds in one or more lines of poetry). Assonance is an effective technique in Nwadike's poetry. The assonance technique he invented without any prior knowledge of someone splitting every line of poetry into two parts with the last word of the first part made to rhyme with the last word of the second part emerged from his emotionist method in poetry. Edgar Allan Poe used this split-line assonance technique although inconsistently. Poe's "The Raven" (lines 1-8) says,

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
“’Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door—
Only this and nothing more.”

This form of assonance also occurs in Poe’s “Annabel Lee” but only in the last stanza (lines 34-41):

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea,
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

The third true test of poetic art is: the ability to encounter a topic or theme in an emotion-stirring manner and to generate from that experience words, lines and stanzas that effectively convey and evoke similar emotions in an audience and excite their imaginations and senses in that respect. A poem that does not awaken the emotions, imagination and senses is a bland one, that is, it is blind, unfeeling, tasteless, odourless and deaf. On the contrary, a good poem is like a well-prepared meal that, when served to people, activates emotions and by the powers of the imagination, opens up their sensory organs to see, feel, taste, smell and hear the delicious meal.

As a method and movement in literature, emotionism offers a new approach that adds to the existing global toolbox. When a poet selects a topic or theme for a literary work yet to be written, the poet will proceed to have a psychological encounter with that topic or theme in a way that awakens the imagination and emotions. As this occurs, those emergent emotions (love, hatred, anger, joy, etc.) are allowed to roll out in full at their own pace while the poet’s mind, as it were, is now hovering over them, now tunnelling through, now intertwining with them. From these interactions, the poet will pick up a pulse like a doctor using a stethoscope to pick up a heartbeat.

The pulse picked up is like a rhythm in its crude form but which will become amplified in size and sharpened in structure as the poet’s mind keeps on actively engaging with the pulse. The final outcome will be a poem whose style (lyrical form and imaginative use of language) and

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

structure (arrangement of lines and stanzas) best suits the pre-selected topic or theme. This scenario is like how a sound engineer picks up a particular sound in a background noise, amplifies it for recognition and sharpens it to identify its structure and features.

Another feature of the emotionist encounter as it unfolds is imbuing the emerging poem with vision and mission. This is about making a poem discuss specific concerns in a particular way. Vision and mission help keep the unfolding emotionist process well-directed rather than things derailing into a chaos of uncharted emotions, styles and structures. The freer the emotions, the more poetic the style and structure, and the more imbued it is with vision and mission. At the end of this emotionist process (which may include revisions of the poem), the final draft generated will be characterized by organic unity between all its words, lines, stanzas, lyrical style, vision and mission because they all came out of the same kiln. Thus, none of its features would feel like an add-on (external). This is unlike poems one may enjoy but wish they were cast in a better style and structure. While the emotionist method provides excellent poems, excellent poems can also come through non-emotionist methods.

The emotionist process during which a poet's mind roams free, now hovering over, now tunnelling through, now intertwining with unfurling emotions echoes the biblical creation story in the *Book of Genesis* (a composite work written between 950 B.C. and 500 B.C.). The depiction of a divine Mind (Spirit) hovering over formless matter (chaos) and God creating the universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) by the power of the divine Word is akin to how a poet's mind hovers over a chaos of unfurling emotions to produce a poem by the power of the poetic word. A related scenario is found in Hesiod's *Theogony* (c. 700 B.C.) which contains an ancient Greek creation myth that describes the goddess, Chaos, as the substratum out of which all other deities and things emerged.

Just as the sounds made by the heart, lungs, intestines and flow of blood in the arteries and veins which a doctor picks up using a stethoscope carries important information about the person's state of health, the emotionist pulse a poet picks up from a whirlpool of emotions carries information about the quality of the poem under construction, that is, its style, structure, vision and mission.

This outcome is in line with Samuel T. Coleridge's position in his *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other Dramatists* that metre and rhyme are not external decorations to a well-written poem but essentially constituted in "organic form" with the contents of the poem. Coleridge used this to defend William Shakespeare against critics who said that Shakespeare's poems lacked form because they did not obey the existing mechanical rules of poetry. Coleridge instead argued that structure (form) emerges from content and that a poet's imagination plays a key role in the process.

Major Highlights of Emotionist Poetry

“Hawker Boy” is an example of a poem that emerged from the emotionist method. In this poem, lines 1-8 (first two stanzas) say:

Pacing along the roadside like the world has dumped him on the wrong side,
Thinking through a lot convinced history has contrived a plot:
To frustrate his dreams and toils like a tyrant greedy for more spoils,
And no day would say he rests even as his peers coast to their social crests.

There by the road to hawk and never a leisure moment even to gawk,
For the head is heavy with wares with which motorists are caught unawares,
As he thrusts a loaded hand at faces while not bothering with their races,
Calling out in a voice quite loud in the rain or sun from an indifferent cloud.

“Hawker Boy” is a poem of 6 stanzas of 4 lines each. The first two stanzas quoted above clearly show use of split-line assonance whereby every line is divided into two parts with the last word of each part rhyming with the other last word. This style characteristically imbues each line and stanza with a strong emotive, lyrical and declamatory (as a result of its vision and mission) quality.

In the poem, “Growing Old” (11 stanzas of 6 lines in each), the first line of poetry to crystallize from its pulse after the poet’s encounter with a theme (life’s vicissitudes) later became line 31: “Growing old before my day is old.” The poem’s title was also derived from it. Lines 1-12 say,

On and on he walked,
Skirting muddy potholes, mementos of the night’s rain;
Shrubs so green with life, the air fresh again.
Halting to rest, a politician came by and asked:
“What’s it, Wiseman, looking so distressed?”
A deep breath he took, then deepest thoughts he confessed:

God made me and he loves me,
Theirs the Trinity and a mystery of unity.
Father, Son, and Spirit, source of all matter and spirit,
The cosmos and you, and all races of every hue.
Never did I exist ‘til God thought it wise I exist,
I saw me in a world and it’s been an alien world.

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

The first stanza notably lacks assonance while the second stanza (and the other nine) have split-line assonance. This variation in style occurred because what became the first stanza was actually the last part to be written and it is meant to function as a prologue. It did not emerge from the pulse that generated stanzas 2-11, and, thus, looks like an add-on.

Split-line assonance may sometimes involve the repetition of the same word like in alliterative poetry. Alliterative poetry is the lyrical repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning or end of words, the repetition of similar stressed syllables or the presence of successive consonant clusters in a line of poetry. An example of alliterative poetry is the fourteenth century poem, “The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman” earlier attributed to William Langland but which some modern critics now ascribe to more than one author. Line 1 says,

In a summer season when soft was the sun.

Another example of alliteration is the popular tongue-twister in the Igbo language whose author is unknown:

Papa Pita patara popo panye papa Pọl.

This roughly *trans-alliterates* as: “Peter’s papa procured (a) pawpaw (and) proffered (it to) Paul’s papa.”

An emotionist poem written in 2013 which interrogates the frustrating life conditions of Ibaji people of Kogi State, Nigeria is “Crying School Kids”. It lacks split-line assonance, and this shows that split-line assonance is not indispensable for emotionist poetry. Lines 79-82 say,

Paddling across, selling our produce at neighbours’ markets, we
Lose bargaining power, profiting for just a next meal. For
Neighbours cheat us out, reselling for a profit, and
Re-naming our produce as theirs, banking the loot!

This poem of 20 stanzas (4-line stanzas), 2 refrains and 12 sets of couplets makes ample use of free verse and enjambment. Couplets are introduced at uneven intervals and are designed to usher in a different point of view or a different speaker. For instance, lines 83-94 say,

Our future, the government muses:
Is it a government property or a priority? And
Our life condition, the Church meditates:

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

Is it a mundane distraction or a pastoral commitment?

Lo! It's the Overlord again, his
Impatience made worse by resentment:

How dare you! What arrogance!
Now listen, and never a whimper!

Why complain when
Your generations are hoisted on two pillars:
Farming and superstition, with witchcraft in-between; and
Aren't they the consequences of poverty and remote location; and the cause?

Picking up an emotionist pulse can sometimes come in a dramatic fashion. The earliest signs of the pulse that later gave birth to "Crying School Kids" came in the form of a faint rhythmic, wordless and meaningless humming: la la lá, la la là / la la lá, la la là. Hypothetically put into words, it sounded like "What is this, what is that? / What is this, what is that?" when said with a tempo. As the poet's mind further amplified this pulse in size and sharpened its structure, it metamorphosed into a couplet (lines 11-12) and was actually the first section of the poem written:

Hear the wails, feel the tears;
See the mien, sense the grief.

Emotionist poetry has cathartic effects akin to when someone under psychological pressure just lets it all out, which improves mental health and general wellbeing unlike bottling them all up which affect mental health. The emotionist poem, "Torn Asunder" says in lines 17-32,

For who can be good and not remain vulnerable?
And who can be bad and not be the aggressor?
For virtue makes of one the hunted but unwilling,
And vice makes of one the hunter and willing.
Only a softened heart yearns for solutions the world needs,
While a hardened heart copes without solutions to survive another day.
And whatever games Fate or Providence plays in one's life,
It's the individual who answers for the praise or the blame.
It's a world of irrational happenings born from ancient Chaos,
Heaven generated Order, but it's all pushing back to Chaos.
Search for the meaning of all these and you will find some meaning,
Stop the search and again all return to meaninglessness.

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

For who but God would dare create a universe out of Chaos;
Let Satan dare, and It can't so long hold back a regress to Chaos!
And 'though God has a reason to create a world like this,
It's all in his mind and we don't see enough of that reason.

The verse, "It's a world of irrational happenings born from ancient Chaos, / Heaven generated Order, but it's all pushing back to Chaos" echoes some schools of thought in philosophy, theology, sociology and physics and has implications at the individual, family, group and social levels. It indicates that all the chaos in the world in the private and public domains, in morality, ethics, law and culture is the world trying to push back from order to ancient chaos from where the world had emerged. This is also suggestive of what astrophysics says about the cosmic expansion of the universe and its potential cosmic collapse after a critical point is attained. Indeed, only a divine power can stop a cosmic collapse when the parameters are met.

Emotionism is an auspicious asset because it frees the poet from the burdensome experience of forcing poesy to unfold according to traditional rules of poetry. Traditional rules can limit the full expression of poetic art just as they can enable it. Even the difficulty some people experience while trying to choose the style and structure of a poem yet to be written is enough to scare them from going ahead.

Emotions can be generally divided into positive emotions (such as love and joy) and negative emotions (such as hatred and malice). Both positive and negative emotions can generate poetry through the emotionist method. Okoro (2006, p. xi) describes poetry as a "deliberate ordering of thought in freshly-minted sequence and varying cadence encapsulating meaning and feeling.... [G]ood poetry is located at the junction where sound and meaning meet. Poetry... dwells more in the depth of our sorrow than at the edge of our mirth.... The rhythm acquires more life if it issues from a bleeding heart".

Role of Catharsis in Poetic Vision and Mission

While vision is a future state of affairs desired, mission is the practical steps taken to achieve that vision. Social circumstances play an interesting role in influencing vision and mission in poetic art. Poets highly exposed to the frustrations of life and those mostly surrounded by comfort and happiness will find the emotionist method appealing because it lets them explore their emotions to the fullest and produce poetry from it. Poets living under other life circumstances may not be strongly attracted to the emotionist method and, thus, would be selecting style and structure, vision and mission before beginning the writing of a poem.

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

Catharsis is a notable feature in literature and our understanding of this mostly derives from what Aristotle says about tragic drama. In his *Poetics* (Section I, Part VI), the earliest extant work of dramatic criticism (written around 335 BC), Aristotle states that,

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its *katharsis* of such emotions.

However, catharsis as the purging of the emotions of pity and fear through crafting works of literature to achieve that purpose can have ideological functions. This ideological function is how vision and mission can be influenced by specific interests. For example, pro-Western colonial-era poetry mostly ignored, glossed over or openly supported the oppressive activities of colonial overlords on native populations. To further enable the continuation of that same colonial system, such literary writers would want the victim populations to purge all negative feelings against their oppressors from their minds, which reduces the risk of disobedience and rebellion.

On the contrary, literary works emerging from people seeking independence, respect of their human rights and dignity, and a level playing ground on the international platform would be anti-colonial and recommend not *catharsis* but *memento*, that is, reminder about their sad circumstances and to sustain negative feelings against their oppressors (Nwadike, 2019, pp. 152-153). Such literary writers would write in ways that empower a national reawakening and also encourage disobedience and rebellion through peaceful or violent means, as can be seen in a work like *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, a play by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo.

Aristotle probably stipulated the catharsis of the emotions of pity and fear from bias because he lived during the expansionist military campaigns of the Greek empire especially under Alexander the Great, his former student. Aristotle, a noble Greek citizen, wanted all conquered people to purge every emotion of self-pity and fear after their tragic defeat by the Greek army so they could remain submissive. Charles-Louis de Secondat recounts (as cited in Pagden, 2008, p. 67) that Aristotle had advised Alexander the Great to treat fellow Greeks with dignity but conquered Persians like slaves. Notwithstanding his reverence for Aristotle, Alexander the Great rather implemented a policy of respect, integration and reconciliation. This put him in a good standing with conquered people and undermined potential rebellion.

Indeed, a literary writer can deploy his or her art to a critical assessment of the social conscience and historical practices. For Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1981, p. ii),

Literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society.... Every writer is a writer in politics.

Similarly, Chukwuemeka (2010, pp. 46-54) says that,

Literary scholars have often sought to allay unease at being paid to enjoy the frissons of fiction by investigating literature as a form of history or moral education. And since the late 1960s, academic literature departments have tried especially to stress criticism as critique, as an agent of social transformation.

Conclusion

Emotionism is the transformation of an emotional encounter with a topic or theme into lines of poetry (prose or drama) by means of well-crafted words, a proper structure, vision and mission in a way that also elicits such emotions in an audience. Unlike the familiar method of selecting style and structure before commencing to write a poem, it is out of an emotionist encounter between a poet and a topic or theme that an appropriate lyrical style, imaginative language, curated structure, vision and mission would emerge from a pulse and exist in organic unity. Excellent poetry is one that affects as many of the five human senses and the imagination as possible. Its language draws both the more and the less educated into the world of poetry.

Emotionism is a theoretical framework, a method and a movement in literature. By its merits, emotionism validates the subjective as a credible path to the objective in poetic art.

References

- Chukwuemeka, D. (2010). Literature and the Apocalypse. *The Muse: A Journal of the English and Literary Students Association, University of Nigeria, Nsukka*, 38: 46-54.
- Coleridge, S.T. (2001). Kubla Khan: Or, A Vision in a Dream. A Fragment. In M.H. Abrams, & S. Greenblatt (eds). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature (7th ed.)*. New York: Norton, 1596-1598.
- Donahue, N.H. (ed.). (2005) *A companion to the literature of German expressionism*. New York: Camden.
- Eliot, T.S. (1982). Tradition and the individual talent. *Perspecta*, 19: 36-42. JSTOR. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1567048>. Doi: 10.2307/1567048.
- Gordon, D.E. (1987). *Expressionism: Art and ideas*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hauser, A. (2005). *The social history of art: Naturalism, impressionism, the film age*, vol. iv. London: Routledge.
- Nwadike, C. (2008). *The wiseman*. Enugu: SNAAP.
- Nwadike, C. (2019). Inversion: Emerging perspectives in human experience and literature. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, 7(4): 143-155.

Emotionism: Subjectivism as a Credible Path to Objectivism in Poetic Art

- Okoro, F.U. (2006). *When the bleeding heart breaks*. Enugu: El 'Demark.
- Onuigbo, S. (2010). Language, literature and the development of our common humanity. *The Muse: A Journal of the English and Literary Students Association, University of Nigeria, Nsukka*, 38: 21-33.
- Pagden, A. (2008). *Worlds at War: The 2,500-Year Struggle between East and West*. New York: Random House.
- wa Thiong'o, N. (1981). *Writers in Politics: Essays*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- wa Thiong'o, N., and Mugo, M.G. (1976). *The trial of Dedan Kemathi*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Willett, J. (1970). *Expressionism*. New York: World University.
- Wordsworth, W. (2001). Preface to *Lyrical ballads, with pastoral and other poems*. In M.H. Abrams, & S. Greenblatt (eds). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature (7th ed.)*. New York: Norton.