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Ghost in African Literature: an Appraisal of Selected Ghost Stories from Umeasiegbu's *Abandoned Ghost Babies and Ghost Stories*

By

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Abstract: One major indispensable role of Literature is its ability to mirror the author's society. By mirroring the society, Literature helps the unwary to understand and appreciate the society. Obviously, each society is distinct from another and while some societies are of the view that death is an end point of every individual, the Igbo people and some other tribes in the Eastern Nigeria believe that after death, the soul of the deceased hovers as a result of conditions. The deceased persons still appear to people and some migrate to faraway places to continue their life. This belief is well demonstrated in some works of art by authors from the south eastern Nigeria. Many creative writers in the society write ghost stories to consolidate the belief of the people in the existence of ghosts. Some writers encountered ghosts personally and their experiences with the ghosts inspired the writings of their works. In this paper, the researchers appraise Rems Umeasiegbu's *Abandoned Ghost Babies* and *Ghost Stories* with the aim to x-ray some of the reasons why ghosts exist. The stories in the books are realistic. The researchers therefore, highlight the different types of ghosts as well as their peculiar features as seen in the texts.

Keywords: Ghost-lore, Igbo society, Folklore, Literature, Verbal lore

INTRODUCTION

Ghost-lore is an aspect Literature that features strange beings such as ghosts and spirits of the deceased as the main character. The strange beings are believed to live in the physical world, interacting with human beings. They interact with the living and in most cases, the ghosts marry the living and they have children. On the other hand, some ghosts do not exist to interact and intermingle with the living for the purpose of living in the midst of the living but basically to seek vengeance for some wrongs done to them while they were alive. In his "Endnotes" in *Silent*

Thunder, Uche Nnyagu defined ghost-lore simply as stories told whose major characters are ghosts. According to him, stories about ghosts are very interesting but dreadful especially when they are being related by professional raconteurs. Such raconteurs mimic certain words and clauses believed to be the original words of the ghost as they tell their tales

Not minding how interesting ghost stories are, scholars believe that ghost-lore is fast going into extinction. According to Rems Umeasiegbu in *Ghost Stories*, ghost-lore is a neglected sub-type

of literature – oral or written – in Nigeria. To him, Ghost-lore or ghost stories are stories where ghosts play prominent roles. He goes further define ghosts as supposedly the disembodied spirits of dead persons. According to Uche Nnyagu in *My Husband is a Ghost*, ghosts exist everywhere in the society because certain people die and they refuse to rest in peace, rather they keep hovering in society. Ghost-lore, though a neglected sub-type of literature, as Umeasiegbu observed, is not a new concept in Literature. In many parts of the world, from the time past, people had believed that ghosts exist. In the Renaissance period, William Shakespeare had written plays with ghosts playing key roles as characters. In his *Hamlet*, ghost of Hamlet's father featured as a character in the play. Throughout *Hamlet*, ghosts appeared about four times. In Act I, Scene I, Scene iv, and v and in Scene iv of Act III, Ghost prominently featured, making their presence known usually at night. This is an evidence that before the contemporary era, ancient people all over the world had believed that ghosts exist. In 1764, the Gothic novel emerged. According to M. H. Abrams, Gothic novels, otherwise known as Gothic romance, is a type of prose fiction which was inaugurated by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (117).

According to K. J. Kennedy, Dana Gioia and Mark Bauerlein in *Handbook of Literary Terms: Literature, Language and Theory*, Gothic fiction is a genre whose dominant mood is terror and suspense, whose setting is an isolated castle, mansion, or monastery, and whose characters include an incongruous hero or heroine surrounded by mysterious or threatening individuals (73). To make it more vivid, they disclose that "Beneath the surface of rural landscapes, aged churches, and country estates lie bloody deeds from the past, illicit passions, and ghostly presences, as if beneath the order of civil society and rational thought lay evil forces and insane motives (73). To Chris Baldick in *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Gothic novel or Gothic romance is a story of terror and suspense, usually set in a gloomy old castle or monastery (hence 'Gothic', a term applied to medieval architecture and thus

associated in the 18th century with superstition). To vivify that before now, people all over the world, had believed that ghosts existed, many scholars disclose in their works, that stories about ghosts had always been told in different societies of the world. Phya Anuman Rajadhon in *Essays on Thai Folklore*, writes that ghost stories were part of Thai Folklore, an indication that ghost stories had been very popular in Thailand around late 18th century and in the 19th century. To Chris Baldick, following the appearance of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the Gothic novel flourished in Britain from the 1790s to the 1820s, dominated by Ann Radcliffe, whose *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) had many imitators. She was careful to explain away the apparently supernatural occurrences in her stories, but other writers, like M. G. Lewis in *The Monk* (1796), made free use of ghosts and demons along with scenes of cruelty and horror (107).

Theoretical Framework

To some, stories about ghosts are unrealistic and as such, research of this type would adopt magical realism as a theoretical framework for the analysis. The Igbo and some other tribes in Nigeria strongly believe that ghosts are real as a result that some dead persons refuse to rest in peace. The people believe that the soul of the deceased does not rest in peace but hovers around the society as a result of the issues surrounding the death or as a result that funeral rites were not done for the deceased. Ghost stories are realistic hence, the researchers' reason for adopting Realism as the theoretical framework for the work. Realism, in the view of M. H. Abrams, is applied by literary critics to designate a recurrent mode, in various eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature (269). According to M. A. R. Habib, realism is a literary approach that arose in many parts of Europe and in America, beginning in the 1840s which aims generally, to offer a truthful, accurate, and objective representation of the real world, both external world and the human self. To Habib, to achieve the aim of Realism, realists resorted to a number of strategies: the use of detail; avoidance of what was imaginary and mythical; adherence to the

requirements of probability; inclusion of characters and incidents from all social strata, dealing not merely with rulers and nobility; focusing on contemporary life rather than longing for some idealized past; and using colloquial idioms and everyday speech. Ghost stories in Igbo society are realistic and the writers of the genre are expected to avoid any form of idealism and present their stories in a very credible means as to maintain the features of realism. According to Habib, Realism, as a literary theory, was made prominent by Flaubert and Balzac in France, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy in Russia, George Eliot and Charles Dickens. In Nigeria, Chinua Achebe, the most prominent African novelist, in his famous novel, *Things Fall Apart*, popularise realism in African Literature not without, of course, stories about ghosts. *Things Fall Apart* greatly differed from Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* that profusely incorporated incredible and incongruous episodes. To Achebe, novelists should try and maintain realism by making their works look real and credible. He consolidates the fact that ghosts exist in society when he wrote the realistic and didactic ghost story, *The Flute* which features ghosts as part of the characters in the story.

Ghost-lore as an Aspect of Folklore

Folklore is described by Margaret Drabble and Jenny Stringer as the traditional beliefs, legends and customs current among the common people; and the study of them (235). By traditional, they imply that it is an ancient phenomenon and probably preserved and documented via oral tradition. Each society has things that are peculiar to them, which unites them as one. To Chris Baldick, folklore is a modern term for the body of traditional customs, superstitions, stories, dances, and songs that have been adopted and maintained within a given community by processes of repetition not reliant on the written word (99). He goes further to give examples of things considered as examples of folklore to include folk songs, folk-tales and the broad category of cultural forms, omens, spells, and rituals, especially those of pre-literate societies or social classes. From the view of Baldick, folklore as the belief of a people, thrived in the

pre-literate society via oral tradition as the people were not literate to have stories about them documented in the written form. It is therefore, not an aberration to have the same stories documented in written form. According to M. H. Abrams, folklore developed, and continues even now, in communities where few if any people can read or write. It also flourished among literate populations, in the form of oral jokes, stories, and varieties of wordplay (104). *Reader's Digest: American Folklore and Legend* vivifies folklore as the body of traditional customs, beliefs, tales, songs, and the like that are transmitted by word of mouth from generation of a small society to the next. It is folklore because it is communally owned rather than individually owned. He used Richard Dorson's "fake-lore" to consolidate the meaning of folklore. Richard Dorson, is said to have coined the word "fake-lore" to denote stories and characters popularly believed to be folklore, which are actually the product of a single writer or of the media. Folklore was actually coined by an Englishman William Thoms. William Thoms, in 1846, composed the word "folklore" from the words "folk" a people and "lore" their wisdom" as a replacement for the contemporary terminology of "popular antiquities" or "popular literature."

Before colonization of Nigeria by the British, Igbo people had always told ghost stories. Mike Ejeagha, a legendary folk musician prominent for incorporating popular Igbo folk-tales, myths and ghost-lore in his music, when interviewed, disclosed that before colonisation, African people in general and Igbo people in particular, were great raconteurs who cherished their folk-stories. He postulated that the stories were communally owned, hence the stories, even without known origin and also not documented in any written form, are very popular in every part of the Igbo society. According to him, the stories were handed down from generation to generation via oral performance. When asked what triggered the inspiration for the stories, Ejeagha stated that stories of each society were informed by the traditional belief of the society and that the stories were told for their education implications. He clarifies that traditional stories

of the Igbo were told by parents to the young ones or by professional raconteurs employed by the parents because some of the stories were didactic, such that in the end, the young ones would learn lessons that would help them in life. Some of the stories help to explain to them the reasons for the existence of certain phenomena. Mike Ejeagha emphasised that traditional stories were originally composed not by individuals but by the community as the stories reflect their collective belief system. Stories about ghosts were profusely told in the traditional society to consolidate the view of the Igbo about ghost in the past. In the story, "Fowls for Sale" in his *The Abandoned Ghost Baby and Other Stories* Rems Umeasiegbo demonstrates that ghost-lore, as an aspect of folklore, thrives in oral tradition. As oral tradition, the stories are handed from the older to the younger generation. The narrator of the story says, "I would not have believed them (Ghost Stories) if the following ghost story was not narrated to me by my own father. Besides, it is documented in the medical records of the Sapele General Hospital. My father, Mr Odu, lived with us at Sapele. That was shortly after Nigeria attained her independence in 1960 (18). Mr Odu, the father to the narrator, encountered the ghost himself. He had met and bought fowls from Mr Ngwu, another Igbo man who had lived in Sapele not aware that Mr Ngwu had died. This is a personal encounter, narrated by the person himself.

Originally, stories of ghosts were not imaginary ideas of any single individual but collectively owned. As collectively owned, ghost stories reflect the societal belief in line with the belief of *American Folklore and Legend* that folklore is the traditional knowledge of the folk. "Folk", the text described as small groups of people living in isolation who pass along by word of mouth the information and opinions that enable them to live and thrive. It affirms that the material has no known author or source but rather, it is ancient and covers a plethora of topics from myths and legends, weather and planting lore, songs and games to medicine and language (7).

Umeasiegbo is of the view that ghost stories thrive not only in oral tradition; in the literate society, ghost stories are written rather than told.

According to him, "There are traditional (folkloric) ghost stories and literary ghost stories. The former circulate orally and the authors are anonymous. They have all the features of oral literature" He also has this to say about the literary ghost stories: "Literary ghost stories are stories written by creative artists who have intentionally used ghosts in their accounts".

Types of Ghosts

Obviously, there are two types of ghost: **the Visible** and the **Invisible ghosts**. The visible ghosts are those who are seen physically by human beings. Some of them live with human beings who are ignorant of the fact that they are dead. Some of them, as Uche Nnyagu observed, appeared in the odd hours of the day between 11am and 1pm, especially during some specific market days. This is why parents refrain their children from going to certain places at odd hours of the day so that they would not see or encounter the ghosts. The invisible ghosts as the name implies, are those who are not seen with the physical eyes, rather, their presence is only felt when one comes in contact with them. Uche Nnyagu believes that invisible ghosts usually come out at night. According to him, at night, if a ghost came in contact with a human being, he would cause the torchlight or any other light that the person possessed to get extinguished until he (the ghost) had left the scene. When the ghost had left the scene, the light could come back to life and one became amazed that the supposed dead bulb of the torchlight came back to life again (95)

In his *My Husband is a Ghost*, Uche Nnyagu disclosed that ghosts are classified into three according to their characteristic features. He lists the types of ghosts as **Benevolent Ghost**, **Hostile Ghost** and **Complacent Ghost**. He describes hostile ghost as the wicked ghosts whose aim is to leave their victims deformed and in bad state. To him, hostile ghosts are usually invisible, some of them are equally visible. Hostile ghosts were recounted majorly in Rems Umeasiegbo's *Ghost Stories*. In "The Female Passenger Who Turned into a Snake", the narrator, a bus driver, narrates his frightful experience in the hands of the female passenger.

She had entered his bus after the bus conductor had told her that the fare to her destination was two hundred naira and she entered without hackling. At her destination, she evidently didn't want to pay as she only gave the conductor one hundred naira instead of the two hundred naira they agreed. Aggrieved that the conductor collected from her, the correct amount they had agreed, as a hostile ghost, she resolved to deal with them. Soon, she transformed to a big python to terrify all the passengers in the bus, obviously aiming to deform if the money she paid wasn't returned to her. "Pauline and Her Admirers", is another example of hostile ghost. She is a ghost, visible ghost that goes to the hotel where students of Ahiara Trade Centre are having their end-of-term disco at Uhuru Hotel. Very beautiful girl, admired by the boys. She does not hesitate to follow any of the boys that asks her out but it never bothers the people that each of the boys that goes out with her never returns. She is eventually taken to a hotel by a young man. Soon, before morning, she insists on going and they leave the hotel where she deals with the boy before disappearing back to the graveyard.

The benevolent ghosts, according to Nnyagu, are lovely as they leave their victims rather blessed than cursed. He disclosed that benevolent ghosts emanate from kind persons who lived and died and they are usually in form of natural beings. Rems Umeasiegbu affirms that certain ghosts exist not just as ghosts but in form of human beings living in the midst of human beings in the physical human society. He writes that "In Nigeria, the living sometimes marry the dead. Many of the stories in circulation indicate that some dead people travel to distant places to live. Later, they fall in love and have children" (5). Whether visible or invisible, hostile ghosts aim to deform rather than to bless. Stories about people who married ghosts abound, and such ghosts are benevolent ghosts as they usually come to bless, redeem or save their victims. Benevolent ghost is akin to the interactive ghost which Wikipedia describes as being friendly as they emanate from kind people who lived and died. Rems Umeasiegbu's "The Abandoned Ghost Baby" in *The Abandoned Ghost Baby and*

Other Stories is a good example of benevolent ghost. The story is realistic and it captures the belief and experience of those who had had encounter with ghost. The Igbo and some other tribes in Nigeria believe that ghosts go to the same market with human beings and they trade with human beings. The story of "The Abandoned Ghost Baby" is narrated in the third person point of view and the story started with dialogues between the DPO Olerun and ASP Udokpan in a typical Nigerian Police Station. A case had been reported about a certain woman that has left her baby with all the goods she bought from Mrs Ogodo who eventually is discovered to be Ghost woman. Apparently, the ghost had wanted Mrs Ogodo to have the baby perhaps as a result that she had no child yet. Plainly, the ghost has come to bless Mrs Ogodo but she is so naive to understand the message. She could also not fathom why the woman should leave all the costly stuff she had bought in the market with her and disappear. She takes the baby and the goods to the police station and refused to be convinced by the police to take the baby and the goods home after making the report. Her unbelief perceptibly aggravates the ghost woman that she reveals herself to a prophetess in the Cherubim and Seraphim Church at Danfodio Road to inform Mrs Ogodo to return her baby to her at the Danfodio Road Waterside. The DPO, who obviously believes that ghosts exist and that ghosts could strike one if taken for granted, quickly assists and ensures that the ghost baby is returned to the spot disclosed by the prophetess. At the Danfordio Road Waterside, they drop the baby and before their physical eyes, the baby disappears leaving them with goosebumps. This episode and the fact that the bag of onions belonging to the ghost that they had left secured in their office disappeared, get ASP Udokpan who had been sceptic about ghosts, wary about their existence. Umeasiegbu has used a dialogue between the two police officers to vivify. As they get back to the station, the DPO asks the ASP to go and get the bag of onions and to the ASP's amazement, the stuff has disappeared. Though he is aware that nobody took the bag away, he tells the sceptic ASP that someone might have carried the

bag away but the ASP is convinced that nobody could because the door was securely locked.

“Then who took it?” asked the DPO

“Perhaps the rightful owner, Sir” replied the ASP.

“Who is the rightful owner?”

“The ghost, of course.” Udokpan replied

“Do you believe in ghosts, Udokpan?” (17).

With the dialogues above, the message is well passed about the existence of ghosts. Complacent Ghost, Nnyagu disclosed, is the type of ghost that neither curses nor blesses, rather, it disappears as soon as they are seen by anybody who knew them when they were alive. In his words, complacent ghost denotes “One who died in a faraway place and who continues his or her life in another place and who disappears when he or she sees someone he or she had known in his or her former life without harming the person” (6). “The Eke Ututu Barber” in Umeasiegbu’s *Ghost Stories* is a good example. It is about a certain man from Ukpok who lived in Orlu. Eke Ututu is a popular market in Orlu, Abia State in the present day Nigeria. Ukpok is in Anambra State. According to the story, Eugene, the professional barber became a darling to the youths of the area as he was a professional in his profession, giving the youths what they really desired. Then came the day someone who knew him while he was alive saw him and decided to get his people to see Eugene who has decided not to rest in peace but to migrate and continue his life in another place. On the day they agreed to visit Eke Ututu, they actually met Eugene but he disappeared as soon as he saw them

Why People Die and Come Back as Ghosts instead of Resting in Peace

Nothing happens for nothing. According to Uche Nnyagu in the “Endnote” to *Silent Thunder*, the simple obvious answer to the question, why don’t the dead rest when they die, is that many of the ghosts are people who feel that they had not climaxed their stay in the world before they died. He states that this set of ghosts live as normal human beings and do everything with natural human beings and they disappear when seen by anybody who knew them in their former live

(100). Naturally, at death, the soul of the deceased should rest in peace. Evidence abound that many people died and they still live. Nwobu Nwafor was an old man in Umuawulu. In an interview with him many years ago, he disclosed to the corresponding author that some people die and refused to rest in peace because they believed that their live was cut short and they didn't accomplish what they should before they died. He cited example with those who were not married but desired to have have children. Such ghosts exist to accomplish the task before finally resting in peace. This fact is well illustrated in Umeasiegbu’s “The Ghanaian & His Nigerian Wife” (30). According to the story, Theresa, Tessa for short was already married to Lawrence but Lawrence died, leaving his wife with four children. Back in her home-town in Unubi, a town in Anambra State, she established a restaurant. A Ghanaian medical doctor who was always coming to the restaurant to eat, falls in love with her and expresses his interest in having her as his wife. Though his desire wasn’t approved by Tessa’s husband’s family basically because she already had four children. However, she became pregnant for the Ghanaian physician and after she had delivered of the baby, they got married. Years after, Tessa discovered she had married a ghost when they travelled to Ghana. Dr Henry, the Ghanaian physician had pointed at his compound and asked the driver to take his wife and children to the compound and that he would meet them after answering the call of nature. They were told that Henry died many years ago without a child.

A similar story is on page 40, “The Okada Rider”. The story is about a commercial motorcyclist, Okada rider who hails from Abakiliki but resides in Oraukwu in Anambra state for his okada business. As it is characteristic of ghosts, the okada rider is prominent in his profession and he is popular with the name, “Aba Okada Rider” because of where he hails from - Abakiliki. Obviously, in his former life, the motorcyclist felt that he did not live long enough to accomplish his desires. He had no wife and no child so at death, he decided to come back as a ghost to marry and have children. Usually, ghosts do not go back to

their people; they migrate to faraway place and continue their life there. The Aba Okada Rider, decides to relocate to Oraukwu in Anambra state where he met and fall in love with a girl. He gets her pregnant and decides to marry her to fulfil his mission. The girl, based on view of people that Abakiliki is not a wonderful place, decides to visit her boyfriend's people in Abakiliki, the capital of Ebony State. Without informing her man of her plan to visit, sets out for the journey and fortunately, she locates the place and meets her boyfriend's people who were surprised but glad to hear that their son who died without a wife and without a child got someone pregnant. The following day, they decide to go with the girl to Oraukwu to see their son and see if they could do anything to get him back to life. On citing them, the okada rider disappears with all that belonged to him.

Another reason why the dead refuse to rest in peace but hovers as a ghost is sudden death. The Igbo and Calabar people believe that if someone did not die a natural death but died suddenly as a result of accident, the soul of the person departs, goes to a faraway place and starts living with the living in that society. The ghost in this case, comes to the place as an immigrant who has come for a business, he or she marries and have children with a natural human being. The ghost continues to live and prosper in the new society until anybody who knows him or her in his or her former life sees him or her and the ghost would disappear and go to another place to continue to live. "Udak, the Newspaper Vendor" in Umeasiegbu's *The Abandoned Ghost Baby and Other Stories* is a good example. According to the story, Udak who came from Ikota Abasi in Cross River State of Nigeria had fallen from a palm tree and died. He was given a befitting burial but being that he died a sudden death in an accident, Udak refused to rest in peace and began life afresh in Lagos where he decides to become a newspaper vendor. As it is always the case with such ghosts, Udak prospers in the trade and become very popular in Lagos. He marries a woman and has children. Soon, news gets to his people in Ikota Abasi that Udak is in Lagos. The people decide to send four persons to Lagos to go and ascertain if the story is true. As a ghost,

Udak who possesses superhuman prowess had known about their visit and disappears from the place with her family, obviously to continue his life in another faraway place.

Another similar story is, "The Vulcanizer at Eke Amichi" in Umeasiegbu's *Ghost Stories*. The Vulcanizer who hailed from Idemili had died suddenly, obviously in an accident in Idemili but rather than resting in peace, he relocates to Amichi, establishes as a vulcanizer at the old Eke Amichi, becomes popular at the place. We are not told if he has a wife and children but he does well in his trade until he is spotted by someone who knew him in his former life and he disappears.

Ghosts sometimes, appear to people they were close with when they were alive, but who didn't know that they were dead. They only present themselves to the people, in some cases, they would leave a message for them for their people or they might even engage in some business with them. Soon after, the human being is told by those who knew about the dead of the person that he had died. Umeasiegbu's "Fowls for Sale" is a good example. Mr Odu, in the story, used to be close with Mr Ngwu, a casual worker in John Holts. Mr Odu travelled out of Nigeria when Mr Ngwu, who had long left Ikota Abasi died in the village. Mr Ngwu, aware that Mr Odu didn't know about his death, comes to him on his way and sells fowls to him. As Mr Odu would not carry the fowls to his destination, he asks Mr Ngwu to kindly keep the fowls for him at Mr Oyedum's place. Mr Oyedum is the Chairman of Igbo Union in Ikota Abasi. Reluctantly, Mr Ngwu accepts to keep the fowls at the place just to let Mr Odu go. But being that Mr Oyedum knew about the death as he would not show himself to Mr Oyedum, who was even present the day he was buried, Mr Ngwu would not show himself to him. Mr Odu comes for the fowls later but nobody has brought any fowls. Mr Oyedum is surprised that Mr Odu insists that Mr Ngwu whose burial he attended, sold fowls to Mr Odu. Through Mr Oyedum, Mr Odu discovers that he has encountered the ghost of Mr Ngwu.

In "Uncle J, the Ghost Suitor" in *Ghost Stories*, Joseph who lives in the United States of America

is in agreement to marry Ngozi, a student of the Federal Polytechnic, Oko. The marriage happened in June, 1981 and Joseph was in Nigeria for the marriage. After the marriage, he goes back to the USA with the promise that the wife would join him in the States soon. Ngozi goes back to school and she continues to interact with her husband Joseph on the phone. The family and Ngozi never knew that even before Joseph visited home from the USA for the marriage, that he had died. They come to know about the death as people began to commiserate with them and the family contacts Joseph's friend in the USA and he confirms that their son, Joseph had died many months ago. His ghost had come to climax the marriage with Ngozi.

Generally, in most most parts of African societies, ghosts refuse to rest in peace when no funerals have been done for them. We have funerals done for the deceased as a means of bidding them bye for them to rest in peace. When there is no funeral, the soul of the deceased would keep hovering and would never rest until the funerals are given to them. But the most common reason why dead people fail to rest in peace is associated with their death. A person who dies as a result of poor treatment given to him might decide to come back to life to revenge and probably to reclaim his property forcibly collected from him when he was alive. A good example is "The Ghost that Taps at the Window" in *The Abandoned Ghost Baby*. A poor farmer, like the Biblical story of Lazarus and the wealthy king, was forcibly dispossessed of his land by a wealthy man. The poor farmer later dies of heart break but vows never to let the land go. The wealthy man wills the poor farmer's land to one of his sons, Bayu. Bayu, also wealthy, builds his house in the poor farmer's land. Every night, the ghost of the poor man who has decided not to let his land go, always comes to tap on the window where Bayu sleeps. He would never allow Bayu to sleep. The condition intensifies and defies medical treatments. With the help of a native doctor, it was revealed that the only solution is to give the land and the building on it back to the rightful owner, the poor man's family. This is a typical example of ghost whose reason for coming after death is to

recover his property forcibly taken from him because he was poor. The ghost seizes to come to knock on the door the day the right thing was done.

Realism in Rems Umeasiegbu's Ghost Stories

Realism, according to Chris Baldick in *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, is a mode of writing that gives the impression of recording of 'reflecting' faithfully an actual way of life. This entails that realism is a true representation of real fact in a work art. The writer tries as much as possible to represent the society as it is, very credible devoid of any unnecessary exaggerations. Baldick goes further to disclose that the term refers, sometimes confusingly, both to a literary method based on detailed accuracy of description (i.e. *verisimilitude) and to a more general attitude that rejects idealization, escapism, and other extravagant qualities of *romance in favour of recognizing soberly the actual problems of life (213). Umeasiegbu's stories are both plausible and credible as they are apt representation of the happenings in the society. There is no form of exaggeration as the facts about ghosts in the society are realistically presented. To achieve realism, the settings of the stories cohere with the characters. Most of the episodes in *Abandoned Ghost Baby and Other Stories* happen in Cross River State of Nigeria. This place in real life, is prominent with stories of ghost appearing in different parts of the state. Ikota Abasi, in some of the stories, is an identifiable place in the present day Nigeria and it is a place that housed most popular mortuaries in Nigeria. Umeasiegbu in the stories, whether real or imagined, presented as characters, persons from that part of the society whose characters and beliefs are in line with the setting of the works. In an interview with Rems Umeasiegbu, he disclosed that most of the stories in the books are real as he got many of them from people who had direct encounter with ghosts. To make the work more engaging, the writer has given the accurate dates of the events. For instance, in "Uncle J, the Ghost Suitor", the dates of the incidents are given and the dates prove that the episodes took place in the past; many of the episodes transpired before colonisation of Nigeria. The stories survived via

oral tradition and were handed down to Umeasiegbu who put them down in black and white as they happened then. Those that indicate actions that took place in the recent time were presented so realistically with the setting indicating a drift from the remote past. Many stories from *The Abandoned Ghost Baby and Other Stories* are good examples. In “Fowls for Sale”, “Udak, the Newspaper Vendor”, “Dr Ekudo and His Departmental Secretary” and some others from *Ghost Stories* like “Uncle J, the Ghost Suitor” the episodes happen in the literate society. The settings of the stories are modern, and they cohere with the characters whose actions and thoughts portend modernity. From the stories, we understand that ghosts existed in the society in the past and they still exist in the modern society.

Summary and Conclusion

Literature is vital in every society as it enables the audience to understand the author’s society. Writers of literature are inspired by what happens around them and through the literature, certain societal facts are made known to the readers as according to Matthew Arnold, literature helps man to live by interpreting life to him. Ghost stories are not written basically to entertain nor to terrify, the major essence of ghost stories is to get the audience wary of the existence of ghosts as such would help them to

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be conscious of how they treat people. Not every person seen in the society is a human being; some people are ghosts. This is what some people didn’t know which ghost-lore would enlighten them about. The three aspects of ghost stories; hostile, benevolent and complacent ghosts were covered in the two books by Rems Umeasiegbu. Although he did not classify them, the audience, through the characteristics of the ghosts in the stories, is able to distinguish among them.

In order to effectively pass across the message which ghost stories are meant to pass across, Umeasiegbu decided to make use of everyday language in the stories. The language of the stories is apt and engaging, nobody would read without understanding the message. Again, the stories, especially, those in *Ghost Stories* are very brief; the reader can read many stories with full appreciation in a seating.

To make the stories more vivid and realistic, Umeasiegbu has used identifiable places in Nigeria as the settings of the stories in work. Anybody familiar with the places mentioned in the stories would certainly appreciate the stories more. Umeasiegbu’s locations in the stories, in real life, are places prominent for existence of ghosts.

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