Editorial, Authorial, and Narrative Roles in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*

Samuel Okere [1], Samuel Akinmusuyi [2], Helen Ifeoma Ayeni [3] & Chigozi Ijeomah Eti [4]

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1. PhD, Department of Mass Communication, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria.
2. Department of Languages & Literary Studies, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria.
3. Department of Mass Communication, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria.
4. Department of Journalism & Media Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Abstract

There is a distinction between authorial voice and narrative voice. Sometimes it is obvious and at other times it is so subtle and challenging that only a critical reader could identify it. Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, a significant work in African literature, known for its portrayal of traditional Nigerian society and the tensions between the physical and metaphysical realms is one narrative fiction that poses such a challenge. It is in this light that this paper explores the subtle authorial voice in *The Concubine* by focusing on how the novel's portrayal of metaphysical causality is shaped by editorial function and authorial voice. Employing the Theory of Deconstructionism, this paper argues that the inscrutability of life in the novel stems from man's quest for metaphysical explanations rather than any inherent supernatural necessity. The argument in this paper is not on the believability of the myths that shape the narrative's events but on the author's employment of authorial voice as an editorial function to critique the collective unconscious in Omokachi. Contrary to the community's belief that the gods are responsible for the deaths of Emenike, Madume, and Ekwueme, the analysis shows that these deaths are mere chance events. Elechi Amadi uses authorial voice as a subtle editorial function to critique the society's supernatural explanations. The analysis of the circumstances of each death—Emenike's injuries from a fight, Madume's suicide after a snakebite, and Ekwueme's accidental death from a stray arrow—demonstrates that these incidents are not intended to be understood as supernatural but rather random occurrences. This paper therefore concludes that the authorial voice challenges the metaphysical assumptions of the novel's characters, thereby providing a rational interpretation of the events in the novel.

Keywords: *Authorial and Narrative Voice; Collective Unconscious; Deconstructionism; Editorial Function; Illusion and Reality; Metaphysical Causality.*

INTRODUCTION

Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* remains a significant work in African literature, known for its portrayal of traditional Nigerian society and the tensions between the physical and metaphysical realms. Set in a traditional African village, the novel "reflects religious beliefs in the co-existence between the physical and the metaphysical realms of existence through the institution of marriage" (Ogheneochuko, 2022, p. 13). Amadi presents the cultural and spiritual beliefs of a precolonial Igbo community, where human experiences and events are frequently interpreted through the lens of divine intervention. Central themes of the novel include fate, destiny, and the influence of the gods, with characters regularly attributing personal misfortunes, successes, and even deaths to supernatural forces (Akingbe et al., 2024; Onuoha & Ogbodo, 2022; Agbonifo, & Emoga, 2020). For example, the deaths of key characters such as Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme are commonly ascribed to the wrath of the gods, a

common belief rooted in the metaphysical understanding of life and destiny within the community depicted. However, while the narrative seems to support this view on the surface, a closer reading reveals a subtler authorial stance that challenges the surface-level belief in metaphysical causality. Through nuanced narrative techniques, Amadi presents an alternative interpretation of the events, suggesting that the deaths in the novel may have more to do with human agency, coincidence, or circumstance than divine intervention. This opens up a space for deconstructing the collective unconscious beliefs surrounding metaphysical causality within the text.

While *The Concubine* has often been interpreted as a validation of traditional African spiritual beliefs and the role of the gods on human affairs (Agbonifo, & Emoga, 2020; Ojiakor, & Ezenwamadu, 2018), this research seeks to challenge this view by deconstructing the illusion of metaphysical causality in the novel through the editorial function of authorial voice. Although the characters attribute their misfortunes to divine intervention, the text presents the deaths of Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme in a manner that suggests more plausible, human-driven explanations for these tragedies. This raises a critical question: Does the apparent metaphysical causality in *The Concubine* genuinely reflect the influence of the gods, or is it an illusion perpetuated by cultural belief systems and reinforced by the narrative structure? This subtle authorial stance has often been overlooked, as many analyses of the novel (such as Mohammed & Abba, 2024; Akingbe et al., 2024; Usongo, 2019) tend to focus primarily on its depiction of traditional beliefs without considering the possibility of a more skeptical or realist interpretation.

This research, therefore, seeks to deconstruct the collective unconscious and illusion of metaphysical causality in *The Concubine* by analysing how editorial function could reveal a divergent view between authorial and narrative voice. The primary objective is to unravel the critical stance of the author regarding the real cause of the deaths of Emenike, Madume, and Ekwueme—men who were either married to, desired to marry, or had planned to marry Ihuoma, the protagonist. This study adopts a rational approach, shifting the focus from a conventional interpretation to a more nuanced, logical analysis of the text. It emphasises that the reading of a literary work is a transformative process and as such, acknowledges that "literary texts tend to be ambiguous, or at least open to multiple interpretations, along multiple dimensions" (Deane, 2020, p. 3). For this reason, the paper is guided by the theory of deconstructionism. Deconstructionist readings, which aim to reveal the underlying assumptions and contradictions within a text (Alsaqer, 2023), provide a compelling framework for examining the supposed inevitability of metaphysical causality in *The Concubine*.

Deconstruction, a literary theory pioneered by Jacques Derrida, fundamentally challenges conventional views of language, meaning and interpretation. Emerging in the mid-20th century as a critique of structuralism, deconstruction aims to reveal the inherent contradictions and complexities within texts (Derrida, 1981). According to Caputo (2000), deconstruction focuses on uncovering issues that undermine the author's intended meaning by exposing the underlying assumptions and contradictions embedded in the text. Citing Baker (2018), Alsaqer (2023) notes that deconstruction "seeks to dismantle binary oppositions, such as presence/absence, meaning/non-meaning, and original/copy...it emphasizes the fluidity and multiplicity of meanings, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the original text" (p. 962). Ogheneochuko (2022) explains that for Derrida, language functions through a system of signs where meanings emerge from their differences. This suggests that concepts are understood in relation to their opposites or contradictions. Consequently, deconstructionist

critics believe their role is "to find and overturn the various [binary] oppositions in a literary piece" (Ogheneochuko, 2022, p. 15). In a nutshell, deconstructive theory reveals how meanings are not fixed but are instead dynamic and contingent upon the interplay of oppositional forces within the text. According to Buchman (2010), deconstructive criticism addresses three fundamental philosophical issues:

The theory contributes to a literary work by re-evaluating societal values on pure reason. Secondly…a text outlives its author and that literary works become part of its cultural habits. This in turn surpasses authorial intention since the literary artist is subject to his culture. Lastly, deconstructionism reevaluates classical dialectics (cited in Ogheneochuko, 2022, p. 15).

These principles significantly influence the interpretation and analysis of literary works within the framework of deconstructive criticism. Hence, the theory's focus on revealing contradictions and complexities aligns with the objective of this study to deconstruct the illusion of divine intervention in *The Concubine*. By applying deconstruction, this paper exposes the underlying assumptions about metaphysical causality and how these are shaped by cultural beliefs rather than inherent truths. Deconstruction's emphasis on dismantling binary oppositions—such as the metaphysical versus the mundane—helps in understanding how the novel's narrative fluidly blends traditional beliefs with more plausible, human-driven explanations. This approach will enable a nuanced interpretation of the novel by drawing attention to how meanings are dynamic and contingent on the interplay of various interpretative forces. To be able to carry out this deconstructionist task, this paper works on the following objectives:

1. Deconstruction of the illusion of metaphysical intervention by providing evidence in the novel which suggests that the apparent metaphysical causality is an illusion

2. Evaluation of the relationship between authorial and narrative voice in the portrayal of metaphysical events in the novel

3. Exploration of the intersection of authorial and narrative voice as an editorial function

The question of 'who' is responsible for the deaths of Emenike, Madume, and Ekwueme aims to identify the agent provocateur behind these tragic events. This inquiry goes beyond mere causation to seek the identity of a specific agent or personality involved. According to Zhang's classification (2016, p. 1578) of WH-questions, the term "who" is used when the speaker seeks information about the identity of a particular entity. In this context, the role of "who" is an attempt at identifying the *dramatis personae* in the ensuing conflict in the life of Ihuoma.

Probing the Collective Unconscious and Metaphysical Causality of the Deaths

In examining the deaths of Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme in *The Concubine*, the concepts of collective unconscious and metaphysical causality are key to understanding how these events are framed. Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious suggests that human experiences are shaped by inherited, unconscious structures that manifest in cultural expressions such as literature and myth (Jung, 1969). Jung described the unconscious as a "bottomless source of creative ideas" that emerge in artistic works, myths, and religious beliefs (Bushueva & Korkunova, 2019, p. 546). In *The Concubine*, the novel draws upon the collective unconscious of Omokachi, a fictionalisation of the author's Aluu town in Ikwerre ethnic nationality in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, where metaphysical causality is a deeply rooted cultural concept. This belief system, which links individual destinies to the will of the gods,

shapes how the characters interpret the deaths in the story (Agbonifo & Emoga, 2020). Amadi's depiction of these events within a culturally rich framework of metaphysical explanations reflects the collective unconscious of the society he portrays. In this context, the attribution of the deaths to supernatural causality taps into a deeply ingrained cultural archetype centred on fate and the power of the gods (Akingbe et al., 2024). The idea of the collective unconscious helps explain why both the characters and, potentially, the readers readily ascribe these tragic events to metaphysical forces. This shared cultural belief in divine influence extends beyond personal conviction and reflects a broader, inherited unconscious mindset within the community. It takes only a reader who realizes that the author as the creator of editorial content can sometimes act as an unseen presence in a narrative fiction through the employment of authorial voice.

Sakwa and Obura (2022) describe Ihuoma as embodying the archetype of the *femme fatale* or lethal woman – "an attractive lady totally implanted with features of being alluring and dangerous to males" (p. 437). Anyika's confession in *The Concubine* further reinforces Ihuoma's characterisation as an African *femme fatale*. He boldly declares, "Ihuoma hails from the sea, and in the spirit realm, she was the wife of the Sea-king, the sea's ruling spirit. Despite her husband's warning, she sought out human society and became incarnated" (TC, 174). This revelation not only links Ihuoma to the supernatural but also positions her as a dangerous yet irresistible figure, whose departure from the spiritual realm leads to tragic consequences in the mortal world. Her name, Ihuoma, literally means "good face", "lucky face" or "face of fortune", which translates to the fortunate one. Amadi portrays her as the epitome of beauty and wisdom, an amiable and soft-spoken young woman who, by the age of 18, had already become a local celebrity. Despite these admirable qualities, Ihuoma is burdened by deep-seated unhappiness, a weight she would willingly shed, even if it means compromising her virtues. As a result of her innate qualities, three men in Omokachi had already desired at one time or the other to have her as a wife. These men are Emenike who actually married her and with whom she had three children; Madume who lost the marriage bid to Emenike; and Ekwueme, who almost married her at the death of Emenike. None of these men had any lasting relationship with her. They all died in succession, first Emenike, then Madume, and finally, Ekwueme. On who was responsible for these deaths, Osundare (1980, p. 98) argues that the gods play an overbearing role, manipulating the course of events in the lives of Amadi's characters. Agbonifo and Emoga (2020) further support this view, noting that "Amadi's characters crumble under the overwhelming weight of Ogbunabali, the night death-god, or the irresponsible and vindictive sea-god" (p. 2). In this interpretation, man is seen as mere puppets, subject to the whims and caprices of the gods, who control their fate without concern for human agency or will.

Taking a cue from this stance, a search for the *agent provocateur* of these deaths would naturally end up in the domain of the gods. If indeed, the gods are responsible for these deaths, a concern would be, which of the gods in the Omokachi pantheon is actually responsible; and for what reason is the god on such a fatal mission? This question is germane because, in the village of Omokachi, deaths are attributed to man's relationship with the gods. For the gods in Omokachi pantheon to invoke death on an individual, it is either "they had done something wrong or because they had neglected to minister to the gods or to the spirits of the ancestors (Amadi, 1964, p. 53).

Our inquiry shall begin with Emenike, whom Amadi idealises as the complimentary ego of Ihuoma. He is handsome and young. He holds the elders at a high esteem. As for the gods,

Emenike would not do anything to them that could be misconstrued as impudent. We only need to review the steps Emenike had taken when he was wounded in the fight with Madume. On Emenike's behalf, his elder brother, Nnadi, had consulted the gods and the ancestors through Anyika, the *dibia*. He and his brother had religiously offered all the prescribed sacrifices. At recovery, Emenike held a thanksgiving service at the shrine of Amadioha, where Nwokekoro, the priest presided. At this service, of gratitude to the gods, for his recovery, Emenike could not gaze directly at the sacred python, the symbol of Amadioha. For him, doing such would mean defiance of the gods and by extension, the ancestors.

It is therefore unlikely, that such a man as Emenike who holds the gods and the ancestors in such reverence would do anything that could offend the gods to the extent that would attract such vengeance on Emenike as to cause his death. This analysis points to a disconnect between the metaphysical causality often ascribed to such deaths and the actual circumstances presented in the novel. Emenike's death, while potentially framed by the collective unconscious of the Igbo people as an act of divine intervention, does not seem to result from any transgression against the gods. This view aligns with the deconstructionist approach that seeks to demystify metaphysical causality in *The Concubine*. While the collective unconscious of Omokachi may offer metaphysical explanations for death, Amadi's narrative suggests that human actions and interpersonal dynamics are more plausible causes. Literature on metaphysical causality, such as Gallow (2022), and Bushueva and Korkunova (2019), affirms that cultural beliefs often invoke supernatural forces to explain events that are otherwise attributable to human or natural causes. In Emenike's case, the invocation of metaphysical causality appears to be an illusion, shaped by the collective unconscious but unsupported by the evidence presented in the text. Thus, the death of Emenike, far from being the outcome of divine wrath, invites a more rational interpretation. This analysis challenges the assumption that the gods are responsible for Emenike's death. Our inquiry is left with two men – Madume and Ekwueme.

Amadi establishes a *prima facie* case against Madume. He is greedy. He also has a bloated opinion of himself. Madume is the alter-ego of Emenike. He failed where Emenike succeeded. He had desired to marry Ihuoma. Predictably, he failed as Ihuoma had preferred Emenike to him. Perhaps it was to even scores on this matter that Madume got himself involved in a land dispute with Emenike. With the death of Emenike (his double rival) Madume therefore thought it was the right time to re-present his marriage proposal to Ihuoma. When rebuffed, he resorted to assault which incidentally failed and consequently brought more embarrassment to him. By a twist of events a cobra spat into his eyes. This happened when he was over-demonstrating his sovereignty over the land in dispute and the plantain on it.

Applying Jung (1969)'s concept of the collective unconscious, it is understood that Madume's experiences and reactions are deeply rooted in the cultural beliefs and archetypes of Omokachi. The collective unconscious includes inherited cultural motifs that manifest in characters' actions and interpretations of events (Jablon, 2019). For Omokachi, the gods are viewed as ultimate arbiters, and any misfortune is often attributed to divine retribution. In this cultural framework, Madume's lack of harmony with his neighbors and the gods, coupled with his vindictive behaviour, might explain his misfortunes. Madume was also on a vindictive mission when the cobra spat into his eyes. However, deconstruction theory challenges the straightforward metaphysical explanations by questioning the assumptions underlying these beliefs (Ogheneochuko, 2022). While Anyika, the medicine man, attributes Madume's misfortunes to a powerful god, this explanation remains vague and unsatisfactory. Deconstruction reveals that such supernatural attributions obscure more plausible, tangible

causes of Madume's suffering, such as his own behaviour and interpersonal conflicts. The notion that a powerful, yet unnamed god could be responsible for Madume's plight, despite attempts at placating the gods, shows the limits of metaphysical causality in providing clear answers. Furthermore, the contrasting fates of Emenike and Madume emphasises this ambiguity. Emenike, characterised as a peace-loving individual, seems an unlikely candidate for the wrath of the gods, making his death a "complete puzzle." In contrast, Madume is malevolent and to express his greedy nature, has been described in the novel as "big-eyed", and the cobra incident - seen as signs of the displeasure of the gods - are interpreted through the same metaphysical lens that fails to offer a concrete explanation. The discrepancy between the gods' supposed justice and Madume's ultimate fate - his suicide despite appeasement - challenges the coherence of the metaphysical causality narrative. This is against the backdrop of the fact that the gods do not kill someone who has offended them and made the appropriate restitutions.

So far, the *agent provocateur* for Madume's death like Emenike's cannot be identified at the moment. While awaiting a possible clue for the cause of Madume's death, it will be necessary to consider the last of Ihuoma's men. Ekwueme literally means "he that does as he says". It implies a man of will and determination. The only son of Wigwe and his wife, Ekwueme is a child of overindulgence. He suddenly rejects Ahuruole his wife of childhood engagement and rather embarrassingly prefers a marriage with Ihuoma. His parents reluctantly acquiesce to this strange arrangement. In the process of searching for the items that will be used for the ritual that will pave the way for the marriage, Ekwueme is accidentally killed. Working on the collective unconscious of Omokachi, Anyika had earlier begun to offer rationalised answers to the deaths of Emenike and Madume:

Listen; the dibia began, Ihuoma belongs to the sea.

When she was in the spirit world she was a wife of the sea King,

the ruling spirit of the sea. Against the advice of her husband,

she sought the company of human beings and was incarnated.

The sea King was very angry but because he loved her best

of all his wives he did not destroy her immediately she was born.

He decided to humour her and let her live out her normal earthly

span and come back to him. However, because of his great love for her,

he is terribly jealous and tries to destroy any man who makes love to her (TC, 195).

Anyika further startles the family with this revelation. He gives a chilling insight into the supposed agent provocateur of the deaths of Emenike and Madume:

Ihuoma's late husband actually died of 'lock chest' but actually it was

the design of the sea King. As soon as Emenike married Ihuoma his life

was forfeit and nothing would have saved him. Madume became blind

through a spitting cobra and eventually hanged himself. Many thought his

death was the result of an unfortunate accident, a just reward for his "big eye".

I had the same view at the time. But it is now very clear. Madume's real trouble

began after he had assaulted Ihuoma while she was harvesting plantains.

Added to this was the fact that he had desired to make Ihuoma his lover.

All this was too much for the sea King and he himself assumed the form

of a serpent and dealt with his rival (TC, 195).

From the point of view of Anyika, the deaths of Emenike and Madume are traceable to the supposed wrath of Ihuoma's mythic husband, the Sea King. The result of Anyika's divination seems to have further authentication with the death of Ekwueme through an arrow inadvertently shot at Ekwueme by Nwonna. Nwonna, Ihuoma's son from her deceased husband Emenike, was in search of a lizard for a sacrifice prescribed by Anyika. This sacrifice was intended to appease the Sea King and facilitate the union between Ihuoma and Ekwueme. A critical question arises regarding the rationality of Anyika's explanation. According to Anyika, the Sea King's anger is responsible for these deaths: Emenike was afflicted with a respiratory ailment following his conflict with Madume; Madume was struck blind by a spitting cobra; and Ekwueme was killed by an errant arrow shot by Nwonna. This raises significant concerns about the logical coherence and validity of Anyika's divination. Anyika's interpretation reflects a deep-seated cultural belief system that aligns the collective unconscious of the Igbo community depicted in the novel. According to Okoye-Ugwu and Ikonne, such beliefs are embedded within the unconscious structures shared by a community and manifest in their myths and rituals (Okoye-Ugwu & Ikonne, 2020). In the context of the Omokachi pantheon, the deaths are not merely random but are interpreted as the result of divine displeasure, which reflects the community's shared unconscious fears and cultural narratives. The Sea King's role as an agent of retribution shows how metaphysical causality is perceived within this collective mindset, where divine forces are seen as responsible for human misfortunes.

Another pressing question is why these revelations were not made earlier. According to Eko (1991, p. 37), an earlier disclosure could have led skeptical Western readers to dismiss the story as mere children's literature, undermining its credibility and thematic depth. Eko suggests that the timing of the revelations is integral to preserving the novel's structure and moral weight. By delaying the explanations, Amadi maintains the narrative's complexity and avoids reducing the story to simple superstition or fairy tale.

Between Authorial and Narrative Voice in the Portrayal of Metaphysical Events

The distinction between authorial and narrative voice plays a significant role in shaping how metaphysical events are portrayed in literature, particularly in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*. Authorial voice refers to the overarching presence that reflects the author's structural and functional position within the text, while narrative voice is the perspective from which the story is told, offering the reader access to the events and characters within the narrative (Mhilli, 2023; Xu & Zhong 2022; Hankwa, 2019). Understanding the relationship between these voices is crucial in deconstructing the illusion of metaphysical causality in *The Concubine*, as each voice serves a different purpose in guiding the reader's perception of supernatural versus realistic explanations for the events in the story.

Xu and Zhong (2022) define authorial voice as "a heterodiegetic, public, and potentially self-referential" voice (p. 2067). They further emphasise that it does not imply a direct equivalence between the narrator and the author. Rather, it reproduces the structural and functional situation of authorship, meaning that the authorial voice operates outside the fictional realm while maintaining authority over the narrative (Xu & Zhong, 2022). This voice,

distinct from the characters within the text, serves as an indirect guide to the reader, often embedding subtle critiques or alternative interpretations that may not be immediately apparent in the surface narrative. In *The Concubine*, Amadi's authorial voice, though not overtly intrusive, offers subtle hints that challenge the characters' belief in metaphysical causality. While the characters attribute key events such as deaths and misfortunes to the will of the gods, the authorial voice provides clues that suggest more human-centred explanations. This creates a layered narrative where the surface events, narrated through the third-person perspective, seem to reinforce the metaphysical worldview of the characters, but the underlying authorial voice invites the reader to question these interpretations.

Hankwa (2019) explains that narrative voice answers the question, "who speaks?" and can be passively or actively involved in recounting the story (p. 14). In *The Concubine*, the narrative voice is primarily third-person omniscient. Okaka (2019), in his review of the novel, describes this voice as "a know-all, see-all, third person narrator" (para. 29), which allows the narrator to provide insights into the thoughts and emotions of multiple characters. This voice conveys the characters' internal struggles, fears and beliefs in the supernatural. This helps to effectively immerse the reader in the traditional cultural context of the story. However, as Zhang (2020) notes, the narrative voice not only recounts events but also shapes the reader's perspective by framing the story through a specific lens. In this case, the third-person omniscient narrator largely reflects the worldview of the characters and reinforces their belief in metaphysical causality.

Xu and Zhong (2022) categorise narrative voices into first, second and third-person perspectives, with the third-person perspective being the most relevant in *The Concubine*. The third-person view can be further divided into limited and omniscient perspectives (Siemes, 2023; Xu & Zhang, 2022). In the omniscient third-person narrative voice, the narrator has "unlimited knowledge in that they are capable of knowing all that is required to be known about the events because they can penetrate through the thoughts and intentions of characters" (Hankwa, 2019, p. 20). The omniscient third-person narrative voice is particularly important in portraying the complex cultural and metaphysical beliefs that drive the events of the novel, *The Concubine*. This narrative choice allows the reader to understand the characters' deeply rooted faith in the gods while also offering a broader view of the social and psychological factors influencing their actions.

The argument of this paper is not hinged on the credibility of the metaphysical essence in this novel. Rather, it seeks to examine how metaphysical causality is constructed within the narrative and the extent to which it can be deconstructed based on the events in the novel. The western literary tradition is no stranger to metaphysical elements in fiction, and it often accommodates such elements as part of its narrative structure. For instance, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, the reader is required to accept the existence of ghosts—apparitions that influence the plot and characters' actions. In *Hamlet*, the ghost of King Hamlet not only sets the narrative in motion but also serves as a moral compass for Prince Hamlet, which compels him to seek revenge (Mabkhoot et al., 2024). Similarly, in *Macbeth*, "the appearance of Banquo's ghost at the banquet is a pivotal moment that reflects Macbeth's internal struggle and growing paranoia…symbolizes Macbeth's realization of the moral consequences of his murderous actions and foreshadows his eventual downfall" (Srilekha, 2024, p. 1252). These metaphysical twists are not limited to classical works. In Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, readers are asked to suspend disbelief and accept that Gregor Samsa, a young man, transforms into a six-foot cockroach. Similarly, the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling is a contemporary example

of how the metaphysical or magical is seamlessly integrated into a narrative that explores themes of good versus evil, friendship, and sacrifice (Jumaah, 2024).

Thus, Palmer (1972, p. 56) raises concerns about the difficulties of rendering supernatural agents in fiction as credible and realistic, noting that "the use of supernatural agents in a novel always presents grave difficulties such as the problem of rendering them credible and realistic". However, in Ojaide's *God's Medicine-Men*, the author suggests that "there are mysteries in life that cannot be explained through modern belief systems and evaluations", such as Pastor Odele's ability to wield mystical powers against Endurance (Akingbe, 2012, p. 83). This depiction of African mysticism seamlessly integrates into the narrative, which counters Palmer's concern. Similarly, Elechi Amadi convincingly portrays the metaphysical world and its agencies as authentic and credible entities within the collective unconscious of the Omokachi people in *The Concubine*. However, the true issue lies not in the metaphysical elements themselves but in the subtle critique the author weaves into the narrative regarding the blinding effect of religion on its followers. This critique is where the role of editorial management becomes crucial, as Amadi subtly interjects his authorial voice through the narrative without being overtly obvious. The task for the critical reader is to decipher this nuanced intrusion, where Amadi's authorial stance subtly contrasts with the worldview of the characters. A casual reading of the novel may easily overlook this critical interjection, which separates the author's personal skepticism from the convictions of his *dramatis personae*. While the characters operate within a world deeply entrenched in metaphysical beliefs, Amadi's personal skepticism toward religion filters through in subtle ways. Amadi himself has expressed a skeptical view of religion, famously stating that "religion is a *psychological crutch*" (Amadi, 1974, p. 38, emphasis supplied). This statement offers a key insight into how the author's worldview diverges from that of his characters. While the people of Omokachi attribute events to the workings of the gods, Amadi leaves traces within the text that suggest a different, more rational explanation for the events that unfold.

The search for who killed Emenike, Madume, and Ekwueme in *The Concubine* is an objective reassessment of Amadi's portrayal of his characters' understanding of the supernatural's role in their lives. Despite previous interpretations by Amadi's critics, there remains the possibility of finding a rational explanation for these deaths within the interactions between people and events in the novel. Rather than attributing everything to metaphysical causality, as the characters do, this paper probes deeper, questioning what—or who—was truly responsible for the deaths of the men surrounding Ihuoma. Isaak (2020), though speaking in a different context, warned against the dangers of accepting stereotypical evaluations of our world without critical thought. He stated that "under mental slavery black people were forced to regard themselves as non-persons - without a past, without culture, heathens, and ultimately without knowledge of God" (p. 9). This framing stresses the dangers of education or indoctrination without critical engagement, which can lead to a state of mental enslavement. In *The Concubine*, This caution mirrors the condition of the characters in Omokachi, whose blind belief in supernatural forces could be seen as a form of mental enslavement. Their unquestioning reliance on the metaphysical to explain life's challenges prevents them from seeing the more rational causes behind tragic events.

To properly delineate between illusion and reality within the narrative, it is essential to move beyond mere acceptance of the metaphysical framework and adopt a more critical stance. This alternative interpretation invites readers to think critically rather than simply follow the characters' beliefs. By examining Amadi's subtle critique of religion as a powerful force

shaping individual consciousness, we can begin to see how the novel challenges blind adherence to supernatural explanations. This line of inquiry is supported by Shankrappa's assertion that "literature is a powerful tool that can stimulate and enlighten our minds… enhances critical thinking skills, enabling individuals to solve problems and discern truth" (Shankrappa, 2023, pp 3-4). Through this lens, our rational inquiry seeks to demystify the collective unconscious of Omokachi by closely analysing the events and issues presented in the novel. By doing so, the paper attempts to disentangle the illusion of metaphysical causality from the more plausible, rational explanations that Amadi subtly offers through his narrative.

To explore the possibility of an alternative interpretation of the deaths in *The Concubine* from a rational perspective, the novel must serve as its own interpreter. Amadi's portrayal of his characters' understanding of the supernatural provides the foundation for this interpretation. A key figure in this analysis is Ihuoma, whose reaction to the idea of her supposed connection with the Sea King is a projection of authorial voice, an aspect of editorial management that subtly reveals Amadi's critical stance. In a manner that is full of candour, surprise and disbelief, Ihuoma exclaims: "These things are strange and almost funny. I really don't feel like a daughter of the sea" (TC, 119). This statement offers a glimpse of the author's skepticism towards the metaphysical beliefs that dominate the characters' lives. In this moment, Ihuoma's disbelief serves as a conduit for the authorial voice, which signals that the characters are not only influenced but trapped by an unsubstantiated fear. This fear is deeply ingrained in the collective unconscious of their environment, passed down through generations of birth and nurture.

The characters' unquestioning faith in the supernatural is further reinforced by figures like the *dibias*, represented by Anyika and Agwoturumbe, who exploit the characters' fears for personal gain. These traditional healers, who claim to communicate with the gods and the spirits, take advantage of the collective psychological state of the community, using fear as a tool to maintain their influence. The dibias' manipulation is evident in the way they perpetuate the myth that the Sea King is responsible for the tragedies befalling those around Ihuoma, including Ekwueme. Amadi's authorial voice becomes even more apparent in moments where the characters grapple with their own doubts. For instance, Ekwueme, though initially skeptical, cannot fully escape the psychological grip of the belief system that has been ingrained in him. As the narrative points out: "but religion is a deep-seated thing and in spite of himself, the medicine man's divination haunted him" (TC, 119). This statement clearly reflects Amadi's critique of the powerful hold that religion and superstition have over his characters. It reveals how deeply these beliefs penetrate the psyche and shapes not only individual decisions but also the community's collective reality.

From this moment, Ekwueme emerges as a split personality, caught between his rational self and the deeply ingrained superstitions of his society. The author, Elechi Amadi, presents a psychologically entrapped Ekwueme, unable to reconcile his personal doubts with the collective beliefs that dominate his community. A privilege into the soliloquy of Ekwueme suffices as evidence:

> If what Agwoturumbe and Anyika divined is true,
>
> Then I think it is extremely risky for me to take part
>
> in this sacrifice on the river. As they say, the sea King is
>
> all out to destroy me. I know I have not married Ihuoma yet,
>
> but we must be aware that I am about to. The outing on the river

gives him an excellent opportunity to deal with me. First, the water

is his own element; secondly, it will be very dark by midnight, and

we shall be the only people on the river at that time; third, I can't swim.

Now suppose the boat turns over which can easily happen in the darkness,

where will we be? I shall not step into the tiger's mouth just like that (TC, 209).

Ekwueme's soliloquy on the bleak hope for the pacification rite voyage is a last seal for his resistance and survival. Before Nwonna's arrow inadvertently hit him, Ekwueme was already psychologically dead. Two other characters in the novel also serve as conduits for the expression of authorial voice. Through these examples of authorial voice, the reader is able to decipher the critical stance of the author on the authenticity of the myth of the sea King. First, Wakiri, the village wag:

Your imagination is working too hard, Ekwe (TC, 210)

Then the Boatman:

Well, you see, people often said they saw the Sea King,

but I never saw him myself. I always felt the medicine men

were deceiving them (TC, 212).

These two separate remarks coupled with that of Ihuoma are carefully contrived statements by the author to point out the flaw in the collective unconscious of Omokachi, particularly in relation to the perceived influence of the Sea King on Ihuoma's life and the tragic fates of the men connected to her. The perspectives of these three characters – Ihuoma, Wakiri, and the Boatman – constitute a joint cynical authorial voice. When we juxtapose this subtle criticism with Amadi's careful depiction of the actual causes and circumstances surrounding the deaths of Emenike, Madume, and Ekwueme, it becomes evident that Omokachi is, in fact, a victim of her own imagination. The author's critical stance reveals how the community's deep-seated fears and beliefs in the metaphysical cloud their perception of reality.

CONCLUSION

Authorial voice indicates that the deaths of Emenike, Madume, and Ekwueme, as portrayed in *The Concubine*, are the result of natural and logical events, not supernatural intervention. Emenike's death follows from the complications of injuries sustained in his fight with Madume; Madume's suicide is a desperate response to the blindness caused by a spitting cobra; and Ekwueme's death is purely accidental. Nwonna's arrow, in a romping activity even after the sacrificial lizard had been caught, inadvertently hit Ekwueme, leading to his death. These are random, chance events, driven by biological and physical causes rather than the metaphysical.

Despite the village of Omokachi attributing these deaths to the vengeful actions of the Sea King, the narrative—through its carefully contrived authorial voice—presents a different reality. Amadi subtly challenges the village's metaphysical explanations, inviting the critical reader to see the rational and logical sequence of events. This juxtaposition between the village's superstitions and the author's rational framework reflects the power of editorial function, where the authorial voice quietly but firmly contrasts with the characters' beliefs. In

doing so, Amadi demystifies the supernatural by revealing a clear critique of the collective unconscious that binds Omokachi to its illusions. The novel, through this complex interplay of voices, champions reason over superstition and positions the author's critical stance as one of intellectual liberation.

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