**Abstract:** Fiction is an imaginative story rather than being a documentation of any historical fact. However, fiction, as a branch of literature, reflects the author’s society. That being the case, fiction ought to mirror reality. Realistic fiction thus consists of stories that can actually occur to people or animals in a believable setting. Such stories resemble real life, and fictional characters react like real people in real life. Realistic fiction have plots that highlight social or personal events or issues that mirror contemporary life, such that the reader has no reason to question the credibility of the story. Realistic fiction presents life as it is without exaggeration. Therefore, this work attempts to examine how realistic facts have been integrated in the novel Travails of the Giant by Uche Nnyagu. The researcher has considered the fact that the novel centres on the society and he has adopted Sociological approach as the appropriate theory for this research.

**Keywords:** Realistic fiction, fictional characters, contemporary realism, realistic society.

**INTRODUCTION**

Fiction is a class of literature comprising works of imaginative narration, especially in prose form. It deals in part or in whole, with information or events that are not real but invented by the author. A school of thought describes it as a long narrative which describes intimate human experiences. This means that though fiction is invented rather than a documentation of historical fact, it must mirror life. Although fiction, as Abrams posits, has to do with invented stories, such invented stories will to a large extent, mirror societal facts. In the view of X. J. Kennedy *et al* fiction comes from the Latin *ficio* which denotes acts of fashioning, shaping and making. They add that fiction covers any literary work that might contain information true to reality. Kennedy *et al*’s assertion that fiction entails fashioning, shaping and making, means that although fiction is a work of imagination, it has to be well shaped to have coherence and credibility. It is only when a work of the imagination is shaped to have coherence and credibility that such a work is said to mirror a society. However, Thrall and Addison disclose that the chief function of fiction is to entertain, though it often serves subordinately to instruct. They go further to state vividly that historical epochs and settings can effectively be woven into fiction so that while the work is read for mere entertainment, some historical or realistic facts can be discernable from the work.

Literature is a mirror of life and does not grow in a vacuum. As a mirror of life, good literature ought to be realistic. Realism refers to the theory or practice of fidelity in art and literature to nature or real life and to accurate representation without idealization. In general, realism can be defined as the aspect of tending to lean towards being factual and practical on matters of life by representing things, actions or social circumstances in point of fact without presenting them in their conceptual form. Through the use of literature, realism refers to the attempt of the writer to portray human actions and environment precisely as it appears in everyday life. In reaction to romanticism, realists claimed that precise documentation, sociological approach and vernacular diction were the basis of literal realism. The subject matter was sourced from everyday life, and in this case, the people in lower-class life were considered. After the civil war, realism entered American literature; with authors such as Mark Twain and Henry James being the major initiators of this fictional style of realism in America. The American realistic authors aimed at presenting observations that were objective and without bias.
Characteristics of Realistic Fiction:
Realistic fiction according to Thrall and Addison has
the following features:
• Realistic fiction stories tend to take place in the
  present or recent past
• Characters are involved in events that could happen
• The characters live in places that could be or are
  real
• The characters seem like real people with real
  issues solved in realistic way (so say goodbye to
  stories containing vampires, werewolves, sorcerers,
  dragons, zombies etc)
• The events portrayed in realistic fiction conjure
  questions that a reader could face in everyday life.

Theoretical Framework:
Sociological Approach is believed to be the
most appropriate literary theory for the work. According to M. H. Abrams in A Glossary of Literary
Terms, sociological theory was expounded by Jerome
McGann. Laurence Perrine in Literature: Structure,
Sound and Sense, reveals that Hoping Taine (1828 -
1893), a Frech critic was one of the earliest sociological
theorists. Taine listed three major factors he believed
that determine a work of art to include: race, milieu and
moment. According to Ann Dobie, a more
contemporary statement of the social approach comes
from Wellek and Warren who name three similar areas
that are of interest to social critic to include: sociology
of the writer, the social context of the work and the
influence of literature on society. The relationship
between literature and the society (sociology of
literature) is a specialized area of study which focuses
its attention upon the relation between a literary work
and the social structure in which it is created. It reveals
that existence of a literary creation has the determined
social situations. As there is a reciprocal relationship
between a literary phenomena and social structure,
sociological study of literature proves very useful to
understand the socioeconomic situations, political
issues, the world view and creativity of the writers, the
system of the social and political organizations, the
relations between certain thoughts and cultural
configurations in which they occur. The researcher
asserts that when fiction is studied, a particular
society’s way of life is understood. Therefore, from the
plethora of the literary approaches available, the
researcher has decided to use the sociological approach
in his work. The reason for the researcher’s choice is
not far-fetched, the novel under review centres majorly
on issues bordering on the society.

Realistic Facts Blended In The Novel:
Betrayal:
The issue of betrayal of trust by someone one
trusts is replete in this novel as it is in our contemporary
society where people you trust betray you mindlessly.
In the view of Charles Nnolim, “The fictional
characters interacting with actual historical personages,
through their actions gives expression to the impact
which the historical events have upon people living
them, with the result that a picture of a bygone age is
created in personal and immediate terms.” In the novel,
starting with Uzo, despite that he comes from the same
village (Igboeze) with Okwudili Umeaku, he is a traitor
to his own brother. Okwy, out of brotherly love and
compassion secures him a position as the Head of
English Department, just to make him feel happy and
fulfilled. But after he comes to Okwy’s house to thank
him with a bottle of wine, his attitude changes. He
issues Okwy a query and claims that he has the right to,
as the HOD and that both of them are senior lecturers.
When Chinyelugo is asking Okwy about the
unwarranted query, Okwy says that

…..Headship intoxicates … That is what they
say. If an insider does not kill a person, the person
would live to grow grey hairs. It is the rat of the
homestead that told the rat of the farmstead that there is
meat in the basket. Sometimes, it is dangerous to keep
your own brother too close to yourself because the mind
is deceitful (56).

Okwy has suffered quite a lot in the course of
his struggle for survival in life. He meets with ups and
downs on a regular basis and his own siblings being
instrumental to his retrogression. He tells his wife about
the hatred and envy of Uzo and some of his brothers.
It is not uncommon in our societies today that brothers
from the same parents antagonize one another for mere
selfish reasons. The writer, while affirming that there
are enemies within, is of the view that opposition spurs
the optimists into positive actions. He believes that one
faces no challenge if there is none around to criticize
via opposition. He makes this fact vivid when Okwy
discusses his ordeals with his own brothers to his wife
thus:

One thing I have learnt in this world is that if you have
antagonists, you have no reasons to aspire high. I
believe that anybody who antagonizes me is indirectly
the source of my success and that is why I believe that I
don’t have foes. The only foe I have is the invisible
devil. If I should regard my antagonists as my foes, then
I would start with my siblings. Was it not my own
brother who advised my father not to support my
education? Oh dear! Is there any antagonism that is
worse than that? When he said that, he spurred me into
believing in myself rather than depend on anybody.
When I came back from Biafra war, the same brother of
mine stopped the planned celebration when he spoiled
the minds of the people that there was no need for any
ceremony since my younger brother did not survive the
war (166).

Another serious case of betrayal is that by
Professor Paul, the Vice Chancellor who had failed
woefully in the promises made to Okwy. The novel
opens with the protagonist, Okwuchukwu, going to see
the Vice Chancellor in his office because Professor
Okwy, the Vice-chancellor had invited him for a dialogue. In the office, the Vice-Chancellor informs Okwy about his intention to make him the Dean of Students’ Affairs, but Okwy politely declines saying that he wanted to concentrate more on writing in order to attain the greatest height of his career, Professorship. The Vice Chancellor insists and promises him that he would become a professor in two years if he handles the post which he is offering him well. Okwudili accepts and carries out the duty diligently only to betrayed by the Vice Chancellor. We have a lot of people in the likeness of Professor Paul the Vice Chancellor in our contemporary society; those who would betray those who reposes trust in them. He had promised to help facilitate his professorship if he takes up the task of being the Dean of the Students’ Union. On Okwy’s assumption of duty as the Dean, Students’ Affairs, he counters with the students’ lack of means of transport to the permanent site of their University from the temporary site where they live. The students had planned to go on a protest but Okwy makes peace reign by dousing the flame that had ignited among them. He solves the problem by addressing the students and going immediately to get buses for them. He also promises to get them adequate accommodation. The students’ representatives come later to thank him for his kind gesture. Afterwards, Okwy discusses a query letter issued to him by Uzo, with Chinyelugo, his close friend and colleague in the teaching profession. He decides to go to Uzo, the HOD to enquire about the query letter. Getting there, Okwy meets Uzo who rudely tells him that he had better answer the query, Uzo avers that he has the right as the HOD to issue him query since they are both senior lecturers in the department. Okwy angrily leaves Uzo’s office having torn the letter. On getting to his office at the temporary site of the university, some students’ representatives come around to inform him about their decision to show solidarity to the state gubernatorial candidate, Dr. Chris Ngige, which he obliges. After some days, Okwy sits in his office and the Students’ Union Representatives come to tell him about the outcome of their meeting with the gubernatorial candidate. They say that the candidate promised to solve their problems as students if elected into office. They also tell him that one of the guber candidate’s ardent supporters gave them one million naira. Okwy takes the students to the VC to inform him of the development and the VC asks for his share from Okwy.

When Okwy gets home from work that day, he meets his wife and his children playing Ludo game and he admired the cordial relationship that exists between Ifeoma and her stepchildren. He reminisces on how he met Ifeoma and married her after the death of her first wife and the sufferings he passed through with his late wife, Obioma as a result of childlessness and infant mortality. Obioma died after giving birth through a caesarean section. In their leisure that evening, after the Ludo game, Okwy tells his family about representing the Vice Chancellor at Abuja the following week, the same day that Obasanjo, the President of the country would visit their University.

Students hold protests when Obasanjo comes to their University, Federal University of Global Studies, Ifite. The VC does everything he can to address the situation but to no avail. It seems that it is only Okwy who can bring a solution to the menace but he is out of the city. Touts take the advantage of the protest and it turns into real violence as they block the road through which the President’s convoy would pass. The students plan to deal with the President had they known the car in which he is in, because they feel he is marginalizing the Igbo. When Okwy arrives from Abuja, he is arrested and taken to the police station for interrogation concerning the students’ protest, much to his and his wife’s utter dismay. He learns later that Professor Paul, the VC has masterminded his apprehension. Okwy remains in police custody for two days, despite the frequent visits of priests in favour of him. Later, he is released through the help of Monsignor Uzo and a portrait of him taken during his stay at Abuja on the same day of the protest as a proof of his innocence. He comes home, disillusioned and weak, and after he rests, he tells his family about his experiences as a student, how he survived as an undergraduate and later won a Federal Government Scholarship. Okwy laments human injustice and chronicles his bitter experience about Professor Paul’s betrayal to him to his wife and makes it vivid some ills going on in our institutions of higher learning when he says, “If my document for professorship were sent out for assessment, Okwuchukwu M. Umeaku doesn’t know (130 -131). The professorship has been delayed until the coming of Professor Iloabuchi Oko as the new VC of the University. This is exactly what we experience in our universities where people’s promotions are sat on by those at the helm of authority. However, Nnyagu reveals the truth that no bad condition lasts forever. On assumption of office, Professor Iloabuchi tries to sanitize the University to the discomfort of the bad eggs in the University. The just excels while the evil ones face the consequence of their ills. Okwuchukwu Umeaku’s promotion to the rank of Professor unjustly held is released and Chief Anota, dreaded as someone who makes incessant amorous advances to female students, especially married ones is made to face the music. He tries to persuade Angela a student who is married to become his lover. She refuses and he deals with her by recording zero for her in exams took and did well in. he is eventually caught longing to have sex with Angela in a hotel, a tactical set up by Angela and her husband. The VC decides to sack him after he finds him almost naked in the hotel room with Angela.
Corruption Among Lecturers In Nigerian Universities

The extortion prevalent in most of Nigerian universities is one of the social ills Nnyagu is trying to address in this novel. According to S. O. Osaba in “Corruption in Nigeria: Historical Perspective”. Corruption is a global phenomenon, intelligible only in it social context. Like Nnyagu X-rays in Travails of the Giant, Osaba says that corruption in Nigeria became the principal means of private accumulation during the decolonization period. Nnyagu in the novel, makes it vivid that in the contemporary society, corruption still remains a cankerworm. In Nigeria, it is now an open secret that lecturers sell handouts at exorbitant prices to the students. also, the level of harassment of especially female students in our higher institutions and contemporary world is taking a gargantuan proportion, and the author of this novel deftly treats these anomalies by presenting characters that fail short of these and attendant consequences of their wrongdoing.

Professor Iloabuchi Oko becomes the new Vice Chancellor of the Federal University for Global Studies, Ifite, and he is determined to bring the long-sought positive and lasting changes to the university. Before then, a lot of ills had been happening in the university unchecked. Professor Iloabuchi Oko assumes office and bans the profuse selling of handouts by the lecturers to the students even at exorbitant prices. He also pleads with the lecturers to desist from any form of immoral acts with the students. But before now, the norm had been one form of extortion to another; exploiting the students in various ways. Sexual harassment was rife. Ladies, both married and unmarried, live in constant fear of some amorous lecturers who want them to offer sex in exchange for good grades in exam. Chief Anota has gained unholy notoriety for sleeping with female students especially married ones as he insists that “I love married women because when you play with a married woman, you would not be afraid that she would get pregnant or infect you with any venereal disease” (140). He constantly pesters Angela who he knows is her; exploiting the principal means of private accumulation during the decolonization period. Angela in the novel, makes it vivid that in the contemporary society, corruption still remains a cankerworm. In Nigeria, it is now an open secret that lecturers sell handouts at exorbitant prices to the students. also, the level of harassment of especially female students in our higher institutions and contemporary world is taking a gargantuan proportion, and the author of this novel deftly treats these anomalies by presenting characters that fail short of these and attendant consequences of their wrongdoing.

When Angela rebuffs his request, he makes her fail the two courses he teaches them, just to make her come back to him, plead for mercy and agree to his request. Worried by her unjustifiable failure of the courses, Angela comes to Chief Anota and sets him up in a hotel room where he is trying to have a roll in the hay with Angela. That amounts to his losing his job as a lecturer, defiling the commonly held belief about him that he is invincible.

In order to portray a balanced realistic view of our society, Nnyagu also says that only lecturers are not to blame. What makes men always want to go after women partly comes from the women. He makes it vivid that some students harass the male lecturers by wearing skimpy dresses and other immodest dresses. Cinyelugo says: “Sometimes, the students themselves are the cause of their problems. Some of them harass the lecturers through the type of skimpy dresses that expose part of their body that needs to be concealed” (190).

Okwy, now Professor, in his usual manner, saves some students in Postgraduate defense where some tyrant professors had planned to ensure that they flunk. However, at a point, he is summoned by the VC because the HOD had reported him that he supports exam malpractice. Okwy is surprised that the HOD whom he had been giving his full support and who he had assisted on many occasions could conspire against him before the VC. Undaunted, he continues to render help selflessly to the needy. He indicates interest to vie for the post of Vice Chancellorship with his opponent, Professor Ugokamma, a man dreaded as a sinister being. After the election, through crooked means, Okwy loses to Professor Ugokamma. Not minding, in the spirit of sportsmanship, Okwy goes to congratulate Ugokamma but he receives rather cold reception with obvious contempt because he (Okwy) didn’t step down for him. With the hostility nursed by Professor Ugokamma rising in a crescendo, he denies Okwy the renewal of his contract appointment as a lecturer; Okwy has recently retired but has remained in the University as adjunct Professor. In order to humiliate him further, Professor Emesiu is employed to replace him

Security Agents and Their Corrupt Practices

In our contemporary society, the security agents seem to function with impunity. They arrest citizens arbitrarily and retain them for months and even years without trial. This societal ill is explored in this novel, where the main character suffers an ordeal which he is not guilty of.

In the novel, the police officers sent by the Vice Chancellor to nab Okwy come and whisk him away unceremoniously. Okwy is detained at the police station without trial for days, having done nothing against the law. When Monsignor Uzoiwu comes to the police station to make a case for Okwy, he says, “I
mean Dr Okwuchukwu Umeaku who has been incarcerated since three days ago. He has been here for good three days without his case being tried” (118). Moreover, when Ifeoma hears of her husband’s detention, she says this to Ifeanyi, her son who is eager to know about the whereabouts of his father: “Daddy didn’t do anything but this is Nigeria where the innocent easily becomes the culprit.” She shook her head. “I don’t just like this country for anything.”

Ifeoma, the dutiful wife of Okwy, works really hard to put the house together as her husband is whisked away. When he finally comes back after he is released from the police net, he narrates his ordeal to his wife:

On response, she only sighed and again, dabbed her face. “I suffered incessant insomnia for the three days you were away and I lost appetite.” She shook her head. “This country is a mess! Imagine that somebody would be incarcerated even for days for no just cause! I have said it and so shall it be that anybody who chases a poor fowl will always have a fall….” (125)

Tensions Surrounding Politics in Nigeria

In the novel, Nnyagu is trying to portray the fact that politics, in Nigeria especially, should not be do-or-die affair. He shows this using the character Okwuchukwu Umeaku who loses the election for the post of Vice Chancellorship and takes the whole thing into his stride. He sincerely goes to congratulate the winner, Professor Ugokamma but he is shocked out of his illusion of seeing election and politics as a friendly affair. He says to Stan, a male lecturer in Theatre Arts Department: Stan, I used to think that politics is something done with the spirit of sportsmanship. Oh Blessed Mother Mary! I didn’t know that I had always been nursing false impression. I had always believed that the joy of politics is opposition. Is that not supposed to be so, Stan? (255)

Stan replies Okwy in these words: Our society has a completely different mindset about that concept. Nigeria politics at all levels see election of any category as a do-or-die affair and is why they are diabolic. Honestly, innocent people rarely participate in any politics in Nigeria. They are afraid that their lives would be endangered if they do (255 – 256)

Students’ Protests and the Infiltration of Goons

As it is in the novel and in real life, protest is used to create awareness or decry any perceived deplorable condition a group of people find themselves in. People protest in order to pursue any cause they see as unfair and needs immediate change. Sometimes, the protesters might mean good and just decide to go on protest but some jobless people would use that as a viable means to unleash mayhem to the society. This is succinctly portrayed in this novel when the students of Federal University for Global Studies are going through hell to transport themselves from the Temp Site to the Perm Site and vice versa. The students have to trek a very long distance from school to where they could get buses that could take them to the Temp Site. The students come together to the agreed venue for them to kick off the protest. Nnyagu makes it vivid that as students plan for a peaceful protest, some rascals plan to use the opportunity to unleash mayhem. According to him:

Some jobless youths who had heard about the proposed protest were euphoric and they were prepared to join hands in the protest. It had been the usual thing each time the students planned to protest, the desperate jobless youths would join them and what had earlier been planned to be a peaceful protest would turn out to be a real violent riot. On some occasions, people’s properties would be stolen and properties worth millions and billions of naira would be set ablaze. It was a period when those with criminal tendency had the opportunity to unleash their ill acts (36).

On another occasion, when the students want to protest about the ill treatment of the government towards them, and how the president has marginalized the Igbos and the move to remove the Senate President, Dr Chuba Okadigbo, the students decide to use the President’s coming as an opportunity to express their anger and displeasure to the President. The infiltration of these hoodlums makes the protest rather bloody. As the author puts it,

The Onitsha- Enugu expressway was blocked at the secretariat junction so that the road users sought alternative routes. It was palpable that touts in and around Ifite had joined the students to protest. It appalled the people that even the police could not get the situation arrested as the students overcharged (102).

Since literature reflects the ideologies and yearnings of a people and their society, this work has been able to project the role of literature in bringing the desired positive changes needed in our society. This work critically explores the relationship between literature and the society and it explores the roles that writers of literature play in bringing normalcy and sanity in our societies through the artistic composition of their literary works. Uche Nnyagu in this prose narrative, Travails of the Giant, has been able to expose prevalent societal ills that have bedeviled our contemporary world, bringing it to the consciousness of the society that these corrupt practices exist and they should be abhorred because they have negative consequences.

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