

Helon habila's waiting for an angel



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Helon Habila developed his talent for writing when he took up Literature in the University of Jos. Being a gifted prose fiction writer and poet; he was given the MUSONpoetryprize award in the year 2000. Before going to Lagos to work for Hint Magazine, Helon lectured first at the Federal Polytechnic in Bauchi in a p of three years and was also the Vanguard Newspaper's arts editor. He is now currently spending his time in the University of East Anglia as a writing fellow. The beginnings of his first famous work started as a compilation of short stories entitled Prison Stories that was published in Nigeria in 2000.

Two years after, the full version of the book was released in the UK having the title of Waiting for an Angel. This work of his was then acknowledged as the best first book in the African region and made him won the 2001 Caine Prize for African Writing and the Commonwealth Writers Prize Award in 2003. His latest work was published in 2007 under the title of Measuring Time which is a story about twin brothers living in a village in Nigeria. II. Type of Work Helon Habila's Waiting for an Angel is a fiction that mainly centers on the real events that happened in Nigeria during General Sachi Abacha's reign.

Though the story and the characters were plain fictional, the fact that the people suffered under the military government back then was true. Habila used history as the backbone of his work, weaving stories that tells the real accounts and incidents that the people of Nigeria experienced back in the 1990's. III. Type of Plot The type of plot used in the novel is mainly geographical. The story took place in the country of Nigeria in the city of Lagos. Most of the events, however concentrated on the slums

of Poverty Street where the main character Lombo was working as a journalist.

By reading about the lives of the people living in Poverty Street, the readers will be able to have an understanding of the condition in the whole of Nigeria. IV. Setting/ Time of Plot The setting of the story was in Lagos, Nigeria in the time of the 1990's. Nigeria was in a terrifying state back then and Lagos was known to be the most dangerous city in the world during that time. Nigeria was excluded from the Commonwealth of Nations and almost every country had authorized against it. The country's human rights abuses were horrifyingly brutal and cases of atrocious violence reigns on the hearts and minds of the people of Nigeria.

Military rulers were aimed in plundering the national treasury and the country's most intelligent thinkers and writers who question the democratic thinking of the military were exterminated by the government under the rule of Sani Abacha. Lagos was in a depressing state and the citizens were trying to preserve a bit of hope in their seemingly hopeless world. The novel shows a time when living an everyday life is a struggle and opportunities are almost illusory. Yet despite the dragging effects of the dictatorial government to the citizens, the young people still kept their hopes and dreams in the corners of their shadowed existence.

(" Mostly Fiction: Waiting for an Angel") V. Setting/ Locale The locale of the novel was set in Lagos, a city in Nigeria. Back in the 50s and 60s, the idea of a city was a new thing in Africa since most of the rural citizens were living in villages. This was the cause why Lagos was seen as an alien, a new creation. The city was considered by many as a place where people go and become

someone else, forgetting their identity, and the old ways and customs they had when they were still staying in their villages.

People have the impression of Lagos as a violent place wherein you have to be able to lose your innocence just to survive in the midst of chaos. The citizens of the place should be wise, strong, independent, and cunning in able to live in such a place that was labeled as the Devil's City. Yet beneath the city's image of chaos and sufferings, there is a representation that Lagos was the kind of vicinity that makes you able to stand in your own feet, giving you a kind of maturity that you will never achieve in a world that was far from pain and hardships. (" Bbc News: Lagos")

The story features accounts on the lives of Lomba, the primary character, and ordinary citizens living in Poverty Street. The story's events mostly took place in the slums of Poverty Street which is described as only one of the many feeble, disease-infested residences in the city of Lagos. This is where the climax of the story took place in the event of the demonstration of the people which primarily caused Lomba's imprisonment for two years. This was also the setting where most of the characters in the story found their respective crossroads. (" Bbc News: Lagos") VI.

Social and/ or Political Context The context of the story revolves on the political concept of dictatorship of Sani Abacha and the sufferings of the people under his rule. The military governance was more concerned in looting money from the nation's treasury above anything else and this was the time wherein any hint of disloyalty was mercilessly punished. Nigeria was under the scrutinizing eyes of the military and you can found restlessness in

the actions of the people as intimidating Peugeot's of secret police and patrolling army jeeps inhabit the streets of the city of Lagos.

The very air that the citizens breathe in the country was noticeably charged with threat and danger as seen in the perspectives of Lomba, his first love Alice, and in the stories and experiences of the ordinary citizens in the story. Poverty Street was constantly enveloped in fumes and smoke, a nagging sign that solidifies the fact that Nigeria was under the power of a cruel and ruthless ruler. General Abacha's reign of terror from 1993 to 1998 made his people live with constant fear and shaking hopes. (" Village Crunch")

Life was made difficult during that time as the people of Nigeria struggled to survive amidst the danger that always seemed to overcome them. People were thrown to prison without trial, as like what happened to the main character Lomba, and some were executed just because of the plain reason that they had the strength to question the military government. The civilians were chained to unjustness and everyone was drowned in their delusion of hope and fairness. The context of the novel centers on the struggle of the people under the heavy weight of unjustness hurled at them by the government.

Waiting for an Angel shows a world where comfort was just an illusion and justice non-existent. (" Village Crunch") VII. Characterization/Character Analysis
The main character of the story is Lomba, a journalist in the city of Lagos who was imprisoned for two years as a political prisoner because of his unintended participation in a demonstration in Poverty Street. He waited vainly for a fictitious trial while in jail but the time came when he finally

realized and accepted the fact that his hopes wouldn't be answered as long as the government was run by the military and General Sachi Abacha.

In the novel, Lomba has gone beyond different phases of emotions and perspectives. From beyond anger to the state of tranquility that made him swallow acceptance to his fate. In the middle of his second year in prison, he was able to obtain pencil and paper which were forbidden materials for prisoners and started writing a diary. He wrote in secret about his thoughts and feelings during his detention and hid his pile of papers under his mattress after. The diary became his refuge. It served as his only sanctuary and listener to his private thoughts that were never allowed to be spoken of behind bars.

His first entry was dated on the Friday of July 1997 yet he headed most his entries with only the days of the week. Some of his writings which he entered using exact dates were mostly incorrect. Two months after he started writing, he unfortunately got caught and his diary, which was actually only piles of papers were confiscated from him. (" Bookmunch") Lomba may have accepted his terrible fate as a prisoner but he never lost his hope in regaining back his freedom. An incident came when his jailer, seeing his gift for words, asked him to do love poems for the well-educated woman he is courting.

Lomba used this chance to send cryptic messages to the woman named Janice to communicate his need for help and succeeded in the end. (" Bookmunch") Lomba was only one of the many people whose lives were severely affected by the coup of the general Sachi Abacha. He lived dark days in prison, losing his identity, belief, and faith. Yet somehow he regained

his conviction and fought till the end using his ingenuity. Lomba may have suffered the tortures brought upon by the government but he never lost his ground, molding him into someone with unyielding determination, conviction, and strength.

The other characters of the story were Alice, Lomba's first love who was forced to marry an old and wealthy soldier and histeacherJoshua who served as the main force in engaging Lomba in the demonstration in Poverty Street which caused his imprisonment. Muftau and Janice were also significant characters in the novel. Muftau was the jailer who asked Lomba to write love poems for Janice who in return brought Lomba's freedom in the end. Also, General Sachi Abacha's identity has a huge impact in the novel since it is during his time of rule that the complications and climax of the story happened.

(" Bookmunch") VIII. The Story in the Main The novel is mainly about the sufferings of the people under the rule of General Sachi Abacha for five years. Nigeria was infused with terror and the people lived in fear as the military government took hold on the whole country. The setting of the story took place in the city of Lagos but most of the events were centered on the slums of Poverty Street. Lomba, the main character was a journalist in the city who was put into jail as a political prisoner because of his participation in a demonstration that was supposed to oppose the doings of the government.

He was detained for two years in prison without trial until he came to the point where he finally accepted his grim fate. On the middle of his second year in jail, Lomba was able to gain access on some pencil and paper and started writing a diary. His first entry was on the Friday of July 1997 though

he simply used the days of the week as heading to his succeeding entries. After two months of writing in secret, someone informed the head of the prison about the diary which caused its confiscation. Lomba's only refuge in his dark days in prison was snatched away from him and he yet again entered a time of depression and loneliness.

(" Village Crunch") Another event, however, gave Lomba another chance to hope when Muftau asked a favor from him. Muftau was his jailer and seeing Lomba's work on his confiscated diary, he asked him to write some love poems to woo the woman she likes. Lomba, on the other hand never missed the chance he was given and started using his poems as tools to ask for help. He intentionally plagiarized some lines from famous poets which have secret meanings behind them to communicate what he wants to say. Lomba was able to pass his message without making the poorly educated Muftau to suspect by using his ingenuity in writing.

Janice on the other hand was fortunately well-educated and so was able to decode the meaning behind the poems that was given to her. In the end, she was the one who served as the tool in giving Lomba his freedom. There are also other events in the novel that made it look non-fictional by using characters in real life. Some of these events were the hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa, the killing of the editor of the NEwswatch magazine Dele Giwa, and the shooting of the wife of Abiola who was actually the nemesis of General Abacha.

There was also a part in the novel where Lomba met Helon Habila himself which made the story even more realistic. (" Village Crunch") Waiting for an Angel communicates the hardships of the people under the unjust

government of Abacha during that time in such a way that the reader will even wonder what kind of life they will have if they lived on the same timeframe. The debut novel of Helon Habila centers on fear, exposing the atrocities of the years under Abacha's reign. One of the main highlights of the story however was the people's conviction in having hope despite of the sufferings they are experiencing.

The characters of the novel possesses a kind of touching, inspirational kind of humanity that tells the fact that hope can still exist in times when comfort can only be achieved in dreams. IX. the Analysis of the Work Habila did an exquisite work on this debut novel of his. He was able to turn the story into something that was still interesting despite of the heavy themes it possesses. Because of the artistic sequence of the story and the interesting non-fiction quality of it, *Waiting for an Angel* can be considered as one of the best fictional works about real events. X. Thematic Structure/ Development of Various Themes

The main theme of the story is about sufferings of the people under the regime of Sani Abacha. Fear, the longing for justice, and fighting for hope are also just some of the themes that the story have. The citizens of Nigeria's silent struggle for a new life despite of their unending struggles are just one of the most important highlights of the story. *Waiting for an Angel* revolves around the concepts of wretchedness, fate, and death but in such a way that it not so overly depressing compared to other books because of the unsentimental approach that focuses on the details of the life of the characters.

XI. Language, Structure, and Style Helon Habila presented his work in a language that was easily understood even by the not so deep reader. He structured his novel in such a way that the first chapter was actually the first in chronological order. It begins with the event in which Lomba was already imprisoned and was writing the beginnings of his forbidden diary. The succeeding chapters then narrate the life of Lomba before he was put in jail as well as the lives of the people he knew that intersected his.

Through this presentation of structure, the readers were able to know what will become of Lomba's fate in the end. The readers were put in the place of a dreamer who hopes with every passing page that Lomba will somehow find a resolution that can change his fate. The novel's structure strengthened the book's effect and made it clarifying instead of turning it into a confusing one. In presenting the book in this order, the readers were able to recognize the characters, places, or situations and something of its past or future.

Through this, simple actions or phrases that tend to have little significance were given more importance. XII. Literary Techniques and Devices Like what was mentioned above, the most noticeable technique that Habila used was not presenting the events in chronological order. He also made his work look realistic by inserting himself in one of the parts of the story as well as other events and people that were fictional. *Waiting for an Angel* was as factual as life can be because of its genuine expression of the hardships and sufferings of the people in Nigeria.

XIII. Critical Evaluation/ General Assessment *Waiting for an Angel* possesses the kind of prolonged existence that exceeds most of the current contemporary fictions released today. The novel was able to converse clearly

the message that Habila wants to communicate about. The story was also not so overly depressing despite the fact that most of its themes were about death, unjustness, and sufferings. Habila was able to write about these emotional themes in such a way that the novel was not so boring and dragging.

Yet at the same time, the readers were able to feel the emotions in the story in such a way that they could almost see themselves in place of the citizens in Nigeria. Helon Habila did a great job in this novel of his, giving life to a world that was still waiting for the arrival of their angel. There could be another Habila and another Lomba in this part of the world and their struggle would not be heard. And yet there will be another injustice. It is a never-ending cycle of struggle and fight for freedom. There is only one thing sure. That at the end of the story the victim always loses.

Lucky for Lomba he was only fictionalized in a way that he could give hope to those who are in his struggle today. Let the world know that fighting for your right to live in a free world is not a sin but a privilege. And the world know that you are doing it not for yourself but for the next generation who are bound to be helpless and alone. And for the final words, let those who come upon this novel that there is hope after all the storm. REFERENCES: " Bbc News: Lagos. " (2007). " Bookmunch. " (2007). " Mostly Fiction: Waiting for an Angel. " (2007). " Village Crunch. " (2007).