

Waiting for an Angel: Portrait of
Helon Habila as a Righter

by

Solomon Adedokun Edebor

Lecturer, Department of English and Literary Studies,

Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State

E-mail: edeborsolomon@gmail.com

Tel.: 08062314889

Published in *Agidigbo: ABUAD Journal of the Humanities*. Vol. 1 (1): 24- 34, 2013.

Waiting for an Angel: Portrait of
Helon Habila as a Righter
by
Solomon Adedokun Edebor

Abstract

This paper examines Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* in the context of Niyi Osundare's thesis of “*the Writer as righter*”, an assertion of the role of the African writer in society. The paper discusses the qualities of Habila's novel, and how they conform largely to what Osundare believes African writers must demonstrate before they could be considered as ‘righters’. For this purpose, therefore, I have deliberately adopted the Marxist Literary Criticism particularly as it aligns with the revolutionary temper Osundare proposes. The paper adopts content analysis approach in exposing the tyranny of militarism and the reactions of the inhabitants of Poverty Street.

Key words: Righter, tyranny, militarism, African writer, Marxist literary criticism.

Introduction

Within the short period of its history, specifically just before and after the independence of most of its states, Africa has produced a crop of writers whose thematic preoccupations have dwelt on many of the topical issues that have come to define post-independence 21st century Africa. The realisation of this historical trajectory coupled with the time of emergence of each writer has birthed what we now know as the generations of African writers. However, scholars like Niyi Osundare and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have shown some concern about the corpus of works by some African writers who fail, in their estimation, to provide the much needed succour and vision capable of changing the terrible state Africa has been plunged into since independence. This

becomes the more revealing going by the constant painting of a hopeless situation in their works with their cynical perceptions of their society.

Undoubtedly, to give further weight to his belief on what should constitute the engagements of African writers, Osundare, in 2007, published one of his seminal papers entitled, *The Writer as Righter* where he provides an incisive exposition on what the focus of African writers should be if they are to become the change agents that would cause positive and radical changes in their society. It is, therefore, within the context of the salient issues raised in Osundare's *The Writer as Righter* that I intend to explore Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, with a view to discovering whether or not he has fulfilled Osundare's prescription. To this end, I choose to adopt the Marxist literary criticism particularly as it aligns with the revolutionary temper Osundare proposes.

The Writer as Righter: An Overview

Niyi Osundare's assertion in *The Writer as Righter* (2007) that the African writer is always a 'righter' is intriguing as it throws open a window through which the African writer can be examined more closely with reference to his preoccupation or thematic thrust. Osundare (2007: 30) presents us with the view that the African writer does not only write for pleasure and entertainment but to also change the world. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981:75) lends credence to this when he affirms that "... the (African) writer can and will help in not only explaining the world but in changing it..." Osundare, therefore, highlights different writers that Africa has produced and points out the obligations they must fulfill for them to be qualified as 'righters' indeed.

He says, "A real (African) writer has no alternative to being in constant conflict with oppression" as he locates the cause of Africans' oppression within the matrix of a global complex

of exploitation and does everything within the lens of his imagination to speak against it. This task, Achebe avers, is "a self-imposed responsibility hoisted on the writer by the realities of his existence." Achebe specifically warns:

...any African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of the contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames (Cited in Dasylva 2003: 209).

Many African writers, especially the negritude writers, eulogize Africa in their writings, getting lost in the self-constructed maze of their overwhelming and overbearing nostalgia about the past without a clear insight into the problem of the present, and hardly a vision of tomorrow. They engage themselves in a dialogue with history as they faithfully reproduce the past, but without a progressive recreation of it. These writers, Osundare maintains, are not fit to be called 'righters'.

Similarly, those African writers are not 'righters', in Osundare's view, whose vision and subject (i) focus on the oppressors rather than the oppressed; (ii) believe in the deification of high status and the marginalization of the common man; (iii) whose emotions rise with what they see instead of what they feel; (iv) who have little or no affinity with the working class (v) who were nourished on the intellectual concept of "art for art's sake" and thus reflect this in their writings by remaining silent on the neo-colonial exploitation of Africa, its distressing socio-economic inconsistency, the cannibalistic ethos of its comprador capitalism. These are the people who give the impression that Africa is the sole architect of its own misfortune, thereby leaving out the European factor and forgetting that colonialism was a dictatorial regime that denied people's right to self-determination. These are not "righters" in Osundare's view as they fail to address the marginalization of the common man, giving him the impetus with which to liberate himself and

breathe in a new world of hope. The stance of these writers also runs contrary to the opinion of Ngugi (1972: 50) who said:

African intellectuals (writers) must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal. For we must strive for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country, and sing, a new song.... The African writer can help in articulating the feelings behind this struggle.

Osundare considers many of the pioneer African writers guilty of this obvious act of omission or commission in most of their writings, especially the earliest writings, and hence posits that they are not the 'righters' the African people have been waiting for after all.

There is no gainsaying that African writers have a deepening propensity for social and political commitment as their texts depict socio-political events in their society. Indeed, it can be argued that African writers have accepted their social responsibility to their society, thus, in breath and variety, their texts and intellection reflect the realities of the continent, opening the warehouse of debate and discourse on the role of art in Africa to unearth a robust intellection in support of art not created in a vacuum, but one in which the critic is interested in understanding the social milieu and extent of the writer's response to it (Olowonmi 2008: 59; Kehinde 2005:87). However, the pessimistic view expressed in most of the so-called post-independence novels of disillusionment without a beacon of hope and a call for a radical change in the order of the day, runs contrary to the expectation of Osundare. Ngugi (1993: 68) similarly frowns at this as he posits:

What the (African) writer often reacted to was the visible lack of moral fibre of the new leadership and not necessarily the structural basis of that lack of a natural moral fibre.... Thus although the literature produced was incisive in its observation, it was nevertheless characterized by a sense of despair. The

writer... often retreated into individualism, cynicism, or into empty moral appeals for a change of heart.

Hence, Osundare sees novels such as Achebe's *The Man of the People*, which is a rich texture of life, mediocrity, corruption, cynicism, immorality, ignorance, innocence, poverty, etc; Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, where the writer satirizes certain aspects of the Ghanaian life, and many others which describe in detail the sordid realities of African life in a critical-realistic mode as not only injurious to their society but even do more harm to their profession. He, therefore, concludes that they are not the 'righters' because, as he puts it:

The writer by virtue of his ability to transcend quotidian reality, has a duty to relate not only how things are, but how they could or should be (Osundare, 2007:12).

And Ngugi (1981: 74-75) could not agree more with him. He said:

What is more important is not only the writer's honesty and faithfulness in capturing and reflecting the struggles around him, but also his attitude to those big social and political issues...the worldview embodied in his work... aimed at helping in the community's struggle for a certain quality of life free from all parasitic exploitative relations....

Ayo Kehinde (2005: 97) lends credence to this when he posits:

The (African) writers have dwelt much on the problems of existence to the utter neglect of what the essence should be. It is time the contemporary novelists reconsidered their over-concentration on dystopian fiction. It is by this act that the "real" world will be correctly mirrored and the less sensitive minds will not be erroneously misled to conclude that tragedy and decadence, defeat and disillusionment, are our destiny in Africa, or here on earth. In place of the one-sided jeremiad fictional accounts of the postcolonial Africa given by the

novelists, we would love to see narratives which emphasize “what might be”, instead of overstressing “what has been.”

What Osundare is advocating, therefore, is emergence of African writers with revolutionary tendency -- people who believe in the powerful dialectics between past, present and future, and boldly present this in their writings, with a clearer insight into the problem of the present and new possibilities for the future. Osundare again desires to see African writers who believe in the reconstruction of history for the sake of revolutionary changes -- writers whose writings are not just to help our understanding of the past, but to inspire a change in the present, to breed new Africans against that child of colonialism, and grandchild of slavery: neo-colonialism, having abiding hope in the possibilities of a liberated posterity. Osundare further hopes to see African writers who have been dealing with social issues with rare single-mindedness, having abiding faith of the place of art as a weapon in the revolutionary struggle.

Apart from the afore-mentioned, Osundare also expresses his wish to witness emergence of African writers who always want to create works answering the most urgent questions engaging the contemporary mind; writers who burdened by the "disillusionment syndrome" create a literary tradition that is confrontational, declamatory and generally protesting in tone (Jude Agho 1995: 25); this scholar-poet equally earnestly hopes to see budding African writers whose texts "take on not only a psycho-therapeutic or cathartic value, but more importantly a subversive force" (Olowonmi 2008 60), African writers who have opted for becoming an integral part of African revolution by aligning themselves with the people: their economic, political and cultural struggles for survival (Ngugi 1993: 74). African writers whose works exhibit the afore-mentioned attributes are those Osundare considers as ‘righters’ because, as he posits:

For the category of writers under discussion, literature is a process and a forum of education, a means of opening the eyes of the audience not only to the world as it is, but also as it is capable of being. In the controlled torrent of dialogue that often sweeps the pages, epigrams and revolutionary maxims swim up and down like fertile fishes (Osundare 2007: 35).

It is within the matrix of this submission, therefore, that we shall be considering Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*.

Theoretical Approach: Marxist Literary Criticism

In view of our preoccupation in this paper, we consider Marxist Literary Criticism a more appropriate theoretical approach given the Marxist temper that the novel embodies as it reflects and, even challenges the prevailing social order. Marxism was propounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as a political and economic philosophy in which the concept of class struggle plays a central role in understanding society's allegedly inevitable development from bourgeois oppression under capitalism to a socialist and ultimately classless society. According to Marxist analysis, class conflict within capitalism arises due to intensifying contradictions between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, culminating in a social revolution. Concerning the ideals of Marxism, Barry (1995: 156- 157) states:

The aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange...whereas other philosophies merely seek to understand the world....Marxism seeks to change it. Marxism sees progress as coming about through the struggle for power between different social classes.

Trainer (2010: 2-3) adds:

...in any historical period dominant and subservient classes can be identified. Inequality in wealth and power was of fundamental moral concern to Marx. Some groups come to

dominate others and to win for themselves a disproportionate share of the society's wealth, power and privileges. The ultimate goal Marxists aim at is a classless society, i.e., a society in which all enjoy more or less equal wealth and power.

According to Trainer, Marxists argue that the state serves the dominant classes in society, and this will only cease to exist when society becomes classless, meaning that the coercive apparatus, e.g., police and army, will not be necessary because these function primarily to enforce rules which benefit the dominant classes(8). Trainer equally states that Marx believed major social change is not possible without revolution, noting, "Marxists insist that dominant classes will not voluntarily give up power, wealth and privilege. Their control has to be taken away from them, and this might have to involve violence" (9).

Aside the political experiences of its founders, other influences on early Marxist thinking include the work of German philosopher, Hegel, and the socialist thinking produced in France during the French Revolution. Among the practitioners of Marxist criticism, with divergent views, are V.I. Lenin, Lev Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Korsch, Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Ernst Bloch, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Fredric Jameson, Antonio Negri, Helmut ReicheltSlavoj Žižek, Louis Althusser, etc.

As Barry (2005) points out, Marx and Engels did not present any comprehensive theory of Literature as their views seem relaxed and undogmatic. All the same, the main tenet of Marxist literary criticism is that the nature of literature is influenced by the social and political circumstances in which it is produced; and that a writer's social class and its prevailing "ideology" have a major influence on what is written by a member of that class. Hence, instead of viewing authors as primarily autonomous "inspired" individuals whose 'genius' and creative

imagination enables them to bring forth original and timeless works of art, the Marxists view them as constantly shaped by their social contexts. As Barry points out, “This is true not just of the content of their work but even of *formal* aspects of their writing which might at first seem to have no possible political overtones” (1995:158).

Lending credence to this submission, Delahoyde states that Marxists and other scholars believe literature reflects those social institutions out of which it emerges and is itself a social institution with a particular ideological function. He says:

Literature reflects class struggle and materialism...Marxists generally view Literature ‘not as works created with timeless artistic criteria, but as “products” of the economic and ideological determinants specific to that era....Literature reflects an author’s own class or analysis of class relation (1).

Barry points out five major engagements of Marxist critics, one of which is making a division between the ‘overt’ and ‘covert’ content of a literary work and then relating the covert subject matter of the literary work to basic Marxist themes such as class struggle, or the progression of society through various historical stages (167). Delahoyde, in the same vein, states that the Marxist critic is a careful reader or viewer who keeps in mind issues of power and money, and any of the following kinds of questions: What role does class play in the work? What is the author’s analysis of class relation? How do characters overcome oppression? In what ways does the work serve as propaganda for the status quo, or does it try to undermine it? What does the work say about oppression, or are social conflicts ignored or blamed elsewhere? Does the work propose some form of utopian vision as a solution to the problems encountered in the work (1)?

Using content analysis method, an attempt will be made in this paper to scrutinize *Waiting for an Angel* with a view to unravelling its Marxist elements, as well as the degree to which it conforms to Osundare's thesis of the African writer as a 'righter'.

Discussion on *Waiting for an Angel*

Waiting for an Angel is a remarkable novel of seven interconnected narratives that paint a dark picture of the soul of Nigeria, shedding light on the atrocities perpetrated by the military governments, but leaving us with some measure of hope. It is a mixture of the demands of a tormented soul and the zealous clamour of a dejected patriot. This novel would stir the soul of an African reader. Its recall of some historical events establishes Habila not only as a novelist of substance but also a sensitive, revolutionary and perceptive observer of life and socio-political events in Nigeria of the military era. The regimes in question are the dubious ones of Ibrahim Babangida and Sanni Abacha (1985-1998) described by Olowonmi (2008:58) as "the worst periods of crisis and military dictatorship in the entire post-independence period". That was an era when Nigerians witnessed untold levels of corruption in government, organized murders, hyper-inflation, embezzlement of public funds, imprisonment of innocent people, bomb blasts, nepotism, unprecedented insecurity of lives and property, amongst others.

Primarily, the novel focuses on Lomba, a journalist and would-be-novelist, who at the beginning of the novel has been in incarceration as a political prisoner for two years without trial. He is accused of "...organizing violence...Anti-government demonstration against the military legal government"(18), and so suffers unprecedented dehumanization in the process. Lomba consequently becomes a victim of this despotic regime in every aspect: his vision of becoming a graduate is shattered by the anti-riot soldiers who forcefully quelled the students' peaceful

demonstration, leaving many protesters dead and several wounded. Lomba describes the incident to James Fiki in the following words, "*when school began to look like prison, I had to get out*" (83). Lomba suffers more mental assaults when he realizes that his hope of getting published may never be possible. He has spent considerable time and energy writing, hoping to become a novelist of repute and probably clinch a Commonwealth prize to establish himself in the literary world. But the society he lives in is one that stifles hope, a country where something always contrives to turn dreams into nightmares. Lomba becomes a victim of socio-political and economic realities of modern Nigeria. James clearly tells him:

You won't find a publisher in this country because it'd be economically unwise for any publisher to waste his scarce paper to publish a novel which nobody would buy, because the people are too poor, too illiterate, and too busy trying to stay out of the way of the police and the army to read... because of the economic sanction placed on our country (147).

Even if he eventually finds a publisher, his hope of getting a Commonwealth Literary Prize is beyond his reach "Because Nigeria was thrown out of the Commonwealth of Nations..." (147). Lomba, therefore, opts for a job with *The Dial* newspaper as an alternative to his forlorn hope, only for the company to be razed down by some government agents as they consider their publications injurious to the sustainability of Abacha's government in power. He similarly experiences heartbreaks when Alice dumps him for another man due to the biting impact of the economy on them. His bosom friend, Bola, suffers insanity following the loss of his parents and his sister to a parked military truck on their way to Ibadan. Bola is curiously manhandled by the government officials for the words that flow out of his mouth, not minding the state of his mind. All these have serious effects on Lomba's mind.

Again, Habila paints the despicable picture of Poverty Street and the dehumanized, poverty-stricken people that live on it. The condition of this street arouses pity in the hearts of people and a strong aversion for the callousness of the government of the day:

Poverty Street... one of the many decrepit, disease-ridden quarters
that dotted the city of Lagos like ringworm on a beggar's body
(92)

No doubt, Habila uses the grim picture of this street to depict the appalling state of the Nigerian society. Also worthy of note is the living condition of the inhabitants of this street who have resorted to different despicable means to keep body and soul together. Some engage in robbery, others turn to prostitution, and many others find solace in drinking and smoking to distance themselves from their sorrow. Joshua captures the terrible living condition of these people during the demonstration at the Local Government Secretariat when he said:

...our clinic is run-down and abandoned...we don't have a single
borehole...our schools are overcrowded... our children and our wives are
dying from diseases. We are dying from lack of hope... we do know
what poverty is. We live with it daily (131, 132).

As expected, the military government deals ruthlessly with anybody that raises an eyebrow against its despotic rule. This becomes evident during the peaceful demonstration organized by residents of Poverty Street as the unarmed protesters are suddenly attacked by fifty armed anti-riot police, exploding tear gas, beating the protesters very severely, while many of the running women and children are killed by the police speeding vehicles, and many others seriously wounded.

Habila further adds reality to his depiction of life under Sanni Abacha, in particular, by mentioning notable Nigerians who confront the military and pay dearly for it with their lives: Ken Saro-Wiwa is hanged against international outcry; Dele Giwa, the founding editor of the

Newswatch magazine is gruesomely silenced by a parcel bomb sent straight from the government house; Kudirat Abiola, wife of Moshood Abiola, is shot dead on the Lagos expressway for her relentless struggle for the release of her husband who eventually dies in police detention alongside with some other jailed figures like General Yar' Adua. An attempt made to overthrow Abacha further adds fuel to the already brewing storm as the prisons all over the country swell with political detainees—the pro-democratic activists. Indeed, it will not be out of place to assert that every hint of dissent is ruthlessly crushed by the military government. Bola paints a picture of the climate of fear pervading the nation thus:

The military have turned the country into one huge barracks, into a prison. Every street... is crawling with them; the people lock their doors, scared to come out. They [the military] play with us, as if we are puppets (41).

Through the various episodes unfolded in *Waiting for an Angel*, the author shows the effects of the dictatorship on the ordinary people. The author's inclusion of very familiar historical events and their effects on Lomba and other fictional characters, indeed, forces the reader to ponder what life must have been like during this time. Madam Godwill captures the national mood then in a well-woven phraseology:

Our land is a land of pygmies. We are like crabs in a basket; we pull down whoever dares to stand up for what is right (142).

Habila, however, does not stop here; he infuses the novel with some Marxist tenets by making it to reflect and even challenge the prevailing social order, inviting us to condemn the capitalist exploitation of the society. In the novel, the author undermines classism by

illustrating the injustices suffered under the class system imposed by the military junta. This class structure is concisely captured in the words of Mao:

Look, we are living under siege. Their very presence on our streets and in the government houses instead of the barracks where they belong is an act of aggression. They hold us cowed with guns so that they'll steal our money. This is capitalism at its most militant and aggressive. They don't have to produce any superior good to establish monopoly. They do it by holding guns to our heads (122).

The novel, therefore, serves as a catalyst for the development of the hapless citizens' class consciousness needed to rise up in violent revolution against their oppressors and create a classless society, having abiding faith that the current power structure can be radically altered in the process. Consequently, the novel captures the people's determination to enforce changes in their predicaments. Even though Lomba sees himself as "not very political" at the beginning, he experiences tremendous transformation and stands with the masses even when he knows the dangers involved. After a narrow escape from being arrested when he attempts to help James Fikki get his international passport and some money from his house, Lomba does not renege on his promise to give press cover to the demonstration organized by the inhabitants of Poverty Street to press home their demands. He, in fact, asserts, "...it is important to agitate against injustice, no matter the consequence" (127). It is, therefore, not surprising that he eventually becomes a political detainee. But, even right there in prison, he finds it difficult to refrain from writing to "rediscover my nullified individuality" (9). This same revolutionary tendency is imbibed in Mao who declares during one of his meetings with Joshua, "This country is in dire need of a revolution... we have to utterly destroy the status quo in order to start afresh" (121).

Joshua Amusa, a rather interesting character, leads the poverty-ridden people of Poverty Street to the Local Government Secretariat where they show their displeasure over their poor living condition. Though he comprehends fully the risks involved, particularly after being ordered by the Sole Administrator to leave the premises with his retinue, he still makes their grievances known in his idealistic speech:

... though he (the Sole Administrator) won't listen to us, we won't go until we've said what we came to say...we, the...taxpaying citizens of Morgan Street, are tired of waiting for the government to come to us... we are here to protest against this neglect... this is our decision: that our street...known as Morgan Street, ceases from this moment to be known by that name. It shall, from this moment, be known as Poverty Street (131, 132).

Although this peaceful demonstration degenerates into loss of lives and the maiming of several protesters, Joshua still maintains that he has to do it. This same spirit is noticed in Janice who bluntly tells Muftau, the prison Superintendent, to do everything in his power to see to the release of Lomba, or else forget about her. She considers Muftau's failure to give Lomba's name to The Amnesty International who could have pressurized the government to release Lomba as inhuman:

How can you be so unfeeling! Put yourself in his shoes... Two years in CHAINS... I want you to contact these people. Give them his name. If you can't do that, then forget you ever knew me (30, 31).

It is very glaring that most of the people directly or indirectly affected by the sordid activities of the military regime in this novel have gone through one form of transformation or the other. They have comprehended the true meaning of Soyinka's assertion that "the man dies in him who stands silent in the face of tyranny" (Quoted in Habila, 2007:40). All of them now

live out the ideology of James Fiki that "the time has come when a few bruises, even deaths, don't matter anymore." (148)

To say that the characters presented to us by Habila in *Waiting for an Angel* have not had their full share of the horrible ordeals engineered by the government of the day will amount to an understatement. However, one thing that is most comforting about this novel is that it is less depressing than many such texts as people still have stubborn hopes and dreams; they still try to give hope in an increasingly hopeless world. Lomba who has witnessed severe abuses to his psychological configuration counsels that the harsh realities of the state of the nation should not stop us from dreaming (127); hence his refusal to throw in the towel as he still tucks away some cryptic messages in the poems he composes for Muftau's mistress while in prison. A brief ray of hope flickers when the woman, Janice, recognizes his coded messages and comes to the prison to meet him. Again, when Lomba, Bola and a friend have their fortunes told by a marabout, one of the young men asks to know the day of his death, which he hopes will be "spectacular and momentous," a day he is assured he will know when the time comes---and does (35). Brother who has lost one of his legs to a soldier's bullet in one of the post-June 12 riots still has hope of becoming a millionaire and help in alleviating the suffering of his people and his community at large. He hopes to paint the town red, and have a sumptuous celebration to mark his admittance into the circle of the rich. He expresses his repudiation of poverty in telling pidgin:

Oga Poverty," I go say, "we don finally reach end of road. We don dey together since I was born, but now time don come wey me and you must part (98).

Other inhabitants of Poverty Street are hopeful that good days will come. The drivers, park touts and even the mechanics are all looking for the day to come. Even Nkem who is a well-known robber hopes to get married soon and become a responsible citizen; so also is Nancy who hopes that her lover who impregnated her while in secondary school will come for her one day and put an end to her ordeal.

It may be argued that nobody knows the end of Lomba, whether he eventually becomes liberated or not; some may even see the death of many people in the course of their protests against the repressive government as well as the retreat of the writers at Emeka's house through the back door following the alert that some soldiers are at his (Emeka's) gate as an act of cowardice and defeat, making them to conclude that Habila is not a 'righter', as he appears to deny the reader the opportunity of a showdown. But then who doesn't know that the road to freedom is red? There cannot be a revolution without the shedding of blood. The people who protest and die in the course of their struggle offer their lives as the perfect sacrifice for the anticipated changes in their society, and their death is not in vain as many may have us believe as we gathered in the first chapter of the novel that the military dictator, Abacha, finally bows to the cold arms of death, and his successor, Abdulsalam Abubakar, flings open the gates to democracy that we enjoy today and releases all the political detainees who are lucky to still be alive to see the abrupt end of Abacha. Here, we are also presented with many facts which give us a level of assurance that Lomba may have survived his harrowing experiences; hence he may have been released with other detainees. I do not think the writers' retreat is an act of cowardice or defeat; on the contrary, they simply obeyed a maxim which says, *he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day*. This is made bare in the action that Lomba takes immediately he narrowly escapes from being arrested at this scene as he joins in the protest

being organized by the people of Poverty Street when he could have run for his dear life; so also is James Fikki who refuses to run away despite the endless appeals by Emeka. "No. I'll stay," he declares (168). Those writers who opt for exile do so knowing that they may not be able to write freely at home with the constant threat of danger to their lives.

CONCLUSION

So far, I have tried to show how Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* has captured the prevailing misnomer in Nigeria under military rule in the 1990s, revealing the weight of tragedies under which Nigerians perpetually toiled; but much more importantly is the revolutionary tone of the novel as it calls to mind the need to rise against any form of repressive system. No doubt, Habila has not only reflected the struggles of the African masses but also provides the way forward, affirming that not even death should stop people from rejecting oppression. The author shows that it is only when people do this that freedom can be guaranteed. The novel, therefore, does not only show us how things are but also how they might be. All these qualities, among other things, clearly place Habila in his own class, as against other African writers who have constantly painted a hopeless situation in their works with their cynical perceptions of their society. It can be said, therefore, that Helon Habila has fulfilled many of the imperatives that writers must observe to be considered 'righters'. To this end, Helon Habila is, undoubtedly, qualified to be labeled a 'righter' with reference to his *Waiting for an Angel*.

References

- Agho, Jude. 1995. *Standpoints on the African Novel*. Ibadan: Sam Bookman Educational Ltd.
- Barry, Peter. 2005. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*.
Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Dasylva, Ademola Omobewaji. 2003. The Writer and Ph(f)aces of Conflicts in Africa. *Readings in Language and Literature*. Ed. L. Oyeleke and M. Olateju. Nigeria: O.A.U. Press Ltd.
- Delahoyde, Michael. Introduction to Literature: Marxism. Retrieved January 11, 2013 from
www.public.wsu.edu/...delahoyd/marxist.crit.html.
- Habila, Helon. 2007. *Waiting for an Angel*. Cassava Republic Press.
- Kehinde, Ayo. 2005. Rethinking African Fiction in the Era of Globalization: A Contest of Text and Context. *Journal of the Nigeria English Studies Association*. Vol. 11, No. 1: 87-97.
- Olowonmi, Adekunle. 2008. The Writer and the Quest for Democratic Governance in Nigeria. Transcending Post- independence Disillusionment. *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2 (3): 54- 66.
- Osundare, Niyi. 2007. *The Writer as Righter*. Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd.
- Ngugi, wa Thiong'O. 1993. *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom*. London: Heinemann.
- _____. 1981. *Writers in Politics*. London: Heinemann.
- _____. 1972. *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture, and Politics*. London: Heinemann.
- Trainer, Ted. 2010. Marxist Theory: A Brief Introduction. Retrieved January 11, 2013 from www.socialsciences.art.unsw.edu.au/tsw/Marx.html.