

Penis as Symbol of Masculinity, Power and Trauma in Selected Niger Delta Literature

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Abstract

Niger Delta novelists often employ symbolic language and imagery to explore the prevalent issues that characterise the region. A recurring motif in the selected works points at the dysfunctional family unit, characterised by absent fathers, step-parents, and half-siblings. This portrayal reflects the societal realities of many Niger Delta households, highlighting the significance of the male figure. Through a qualitative analysis of selected texts and anchored in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory as well as the amalgamation of feminist conceptualisation, the study examines how the penis is employed to convey the psychological and socio-cultural issues of the Niger Delta as depicted in the texts. It argues that penis, as reproductive organ, serves as a potent symbol of representation by which writers employ to provide deeper insights into the male role-play and gender dispositions of the people of the region. Findings reveal that the penis is a significant symbol in Niger Delta literature, which is often appropriated by writers in their attempts to proffer deeper understanding of the people's heterosexual and socio-cultural experiences. The study thus sheds light on the cultural, social, and psychological implications of gender roles and power dynamics in Niger Delta discourse.

Keywords: African Literature, Feminism, Niger Delta Literature, Psychoanalysis, Symbolism.

Introduction

A symbol is an object, idea, or expression that represents something beyond its literal meaning. Ross Murfin and Ray Supryia define a symbol as something that, although meaningful in itself, suggests a larger or more complex set of ideas, attitudes, or practices (2009, 504). Similarly, Peter Childs and Roger Fowler describe a symbol as an aesthetic representation of an idea, where the attributes of an object function as a substitute for direct logical description (2006, 232). In this sense, symbols are closely associated with representation and meaning. According to M. H. Abrams, a symbol must represent something that carries significant reference or prominence (2005, 12). Symbolism therefore refers to the use of symbols in literary expression. It may also function as a form of indirect communication in which an entire work or element

within a work represents deeper ideas. Furthermore, Charles Chadwick explains that symbolism is a mode of expression that communicates meaning indirectly through objects, actions, or images rather than through explicit description (2018, 1). Symbolism is thus an important literary device because it enables writers to convey multiple layers of meaning using a single word, image, or sentence. Bonachristus Umeogu emphasizes this importance when he states that symbols start where words end. That is, when a person cannot find the right words to use at a particular moment, a symbol steps in (2013, 113-116). He postulates further that symbols perform an interactive role, stressing that their strength lies in their ability to represent something that effectively communicates its meaning. This again draws attention to the central idea of symbols being connected to representation and meaning. Symbolism and its use have been viewed as features of quality literary works because of their ability to deepen the messages portrayed by writers. Zilibele Mtumane stresses this assertion when referring to its use in poetry, noting that the importance of symbolism cannot be overemphasized (2001, 233).

Niger Delta Literature is known to be rich in terms of its aesthetics and social content. This can be attributed to the use of various techniques, one of which is symbolism, to pass necessary messages. The region is riddled with various environmental issues that have become embedded in the very nature of its people. Ijenebe Anwuri and Olanrewaju Adebua Babatunde describe the Niger Delta as “a victim of its own blessing” and note that literature from the region “reflects and refracts” ecological situations and instances of militancy (2020, 1-3). That is, the literature reflects the issues arising from the “blessing” of having crude oil. Today, when someone picks up a Niger Delta work, they unconsciously expect to see thematic concerns centered around environmental degradation and militancy. More often than not, such themes are the major preoccupations of Niger Delta Literature, with other themes merely revolving around them.

While this area is significant to the populace, since there has been no sufficient change despite complaints, one must note that there is more to the Niger Deltans than the alleged “cry-babies” of environmental destruction and the imbalance in wealth distribution. Most literary works from the region tiptoe around the issue of polygamy or what can be tagged “the complex family system”, a family system where there are stepfathers, stepmothers, and stepsiblings. Francisca Isi Omorodion confirms that polygamy pervades many Niger Delta communities, emphasizing that oil exploration has worsened this situation (2004, 5). She mentions that oil workers and local men use the income generated from oil to purchase female sexuality in terms of social partners and frequency of sexual relations (2004, 6). Postulating further, she notes that field data shows that with compensation or “stand-by” money from oil companies, men married more wives, kept more concubines, and maintained the loyalty of females from the indigenous population (2005, 9).

The origin of this can be traced to the nature of the pre-colonial African male, which is adequately portrayed in African Literature, where the male shows his strength and prowess through the number of wives he has and the number of children he produces.

In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the protagonist Okonkwo is described as successful not just because of his prowess as a wrestler but also because of his wives and the number of children in his compound. In Achebe's words:

Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife (5).

This portrays the idea that pre-colonial African males commodified women as properties to be owned and shown off as proofs of their success. There are efforts by scholars to stem this tide of gender imbalance through consistent education and sensitisation (Udo-inwang and Akpan 2022). These African works, while portraying pre-colonial Africa, show the woman as the sole caregiver of the children, with the man chipping in only when necessary as a supposed deity unconcerned with little things. A man who is not able to assume this role is tagged weak. Unoka, Okonkwo's father in *Things Fall Apart*, whom the writer described as a lazy loafer, was said to have just one wife in comparison to his fellow musician Okoye who had three (1-4). The same situation is portrayed in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's postcolonial novel *Weep Not, Child*, where Ngotho, the patriarch of the family, had two wives who were treated like properties and beaten when their master deemed it necessary, evident in the sentence: "Ngotho did not beat his wives much" (11).

In modern and contemporary Niger Delta Literature, we still see traces of this desire to show strength through the actions of the penis. As such, the penis appears as a symbol of strength in Niger Delta Literature, portraying the realistic nature of the Niger Deltans. The "complex family system" is common in the Niger Delta area, testifying to the idea that the penis is a symbol of strength in the area. This paper investigates this aspect of symbolism in the literature of the region, showing that the use of this symbol helps the reader to understand the motives that drive the characters and ultimately sheds light on the nature of the people.

Literature Review

Niger Delta literature has, to a large extent, has become associated with eco-literature, as most creative and scholarly works from the region focus on environmental degradation and its consequences. As a result, literature from the region has been given various critical descriptions. For instance, Anwuri and Olanrewaju argue that literature from the Niger Delta both "reflects" and "refracts" the ecological conditions of the region as well as the resulting militancy, describing the region as a "victim of its own blessings." Similarly, Benedict Binebai and Abaye Sunday characterize Niger Delta literature as one marked by "nested identities" and a revolutionary temperament (2019, 21). In the same vein, Philip Aghoghovwia observes that writings from the region bear witness to the damage done to its material culture and environment (2014, 43).

Despite this strong scholarly attention to environmental and political concerns, there is comparatively less engagement with gender-related issues in Niger Delta

literature, even though this situation is closely connected to the region's economic and ecological realities. Omorodion notes that the emergence of “standby money” from oil corporations led to changes in male behavior, as men increasingly patronized sex workers, married more wives, and kept more concubines (2004, 6). This suggests a direct link between economic power and expressions of masculinity in the region. Further studies have explored masculinity within literary texts. For example, Debora Klein examines the relationship between economic conditions, environmental crisis, and constructions of manhood in *The Last Duty* (2023). Similarly, Okain Nii Tieko investigates hybrid masculinities in the same novel, arguing that male characters display a disfigured form of masculinity that challenges their access to patriarchal privileges. According to him, manhood operates within multiple discourses that position men within specific socio-cultural realities (2023, 46).

However, while these studies address masculinity and gender relations, they do not examine the symbolic significance of the penis as a physical representation of male power and authority. This study therefore positions the penis as a central symbol that embodies the cultural realities identified by Tieko, particularly in relation to patriarchal structures and their impact on female experiences.

Moreover, there is little to no comparative scholarship that brings together *The Last Duty*, *Sozaboy*, and *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* in order to trace how representations of masculine power evolve across different historical moments. This study seeks to fill this gap by offering a comparative analysis of these texts, thereby contributing to ongoing discussions on gender in Niger Delta literature and proposing a new way of understanding symbolism and patriarchy in the region.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on psychoanalytic theory, with particular reference to the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud. Freud proposes that the human mind is structured into three interacting parts: the id, the ego, and the superego. The id operates on the pleasure principle and constantly seeks immediate satisfaction of instinctive desires. The ego operates according to the reality principle and tries to mediate between the demands of the id and the limitations of the external world. The superego represents internalized moral values, social expectations, and authority figures, often linked to parental influence and societal norms (Freud, 1923/1961, 24–29).

Freud further explains that the ego exists in a continuous state of negotiation between the impulses of the id and the moral restrictions of the superego. In order to maintain psychological balance, the ego makes use of defense mechanisms to protect the individual from anxiety and internal conflict (Freud, 1923/1961, 31). Anna Freud develops this idea in her work *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*, where she identifies and explains several defense mechanisms such as repression, projection, and displacement. She emphasizes that repression is one of the most important mechanisms because it prevents unacceptable thoughts and impulses from entering conscious awareness (Freud, 1936, pp. 47–53). Repressed emotions and instincts do not disappear completely. They often return in indirect ways, appearing as

psychological disturbances or behavioural patterns. Karl Mellinger argues that sexual impotence linked to anxiety and depression can function as a psychological defense that arises from unconscious or conscious fears within the individual. He explains that unresolved emotional conflicts may limit sexual expression, especially when an individual feels unable to meet expected biological or social roles. Feelings of inadequacy and internal tension may therefore appear in the form of sexual dysfunction (1936, 449).

This study also adopts feminist theory in order to examine how the symbolic construction of masculinity shapes the representation of women in the selected works. Kelley Griffith explains that feminist literary criticism focuses on ideas about the nature of women and examines how their experiences are shaped by social structures and gender relations (2002, 198). In a similar way, Jide Balogun describes feminism as a movement that seeks to liberate women from patriarchal systems that place men in dominant positions and silence female voices and experiences (2025, 16).

The foregoing analysis therefore underscores the symbolic elevation of the penis as a marker of masculine strength also supports patriarchal systems that position men as powerful and women as subordinate. Sandra Harding, in her theory of standpoint feminism, argues that marginalized groups, especially women, develop unique perspectives that allow them to question and challenge dominant power structures (2004, 124-128). Women therefore create different strategies to assert agency and make their voices heard within systems that attempt to silence them. The link between psychoanalysis and feminist theory can also be seen in Freud's concept of penis envy. Freud argues that during psychosexual development, girls become aware of the absence of the penis and develop a sense of envy toward males who possess it (Freud, 1925/1961, 252–253). In his view, this awareness plays a role in shaping female identity and contributes to the development of femininity.

Feminist scholars have strongly challenged this idea. Kate Millett argues that the concept of penis envy reflects patriarchal assumptions rather than biological reality. According to Millett, what appears as envy is not directed at the organ itself but at the social and political advantages attached to it in patriarchal societies. She explains that women may seem to envy the privileges, authority, and power that society gives to men, not the physical organ (1970, 204–206). The penis therefore becomes a symbolic representation of male dominance and institutional power rather than a purely biological feature.

This feminist position is important for the present study because it allows the penis to be understood not only as a physical organ but also as a cultural symbol of authority, power, and privilege within patriarchal systems. In the selected Niger Delta texts, this symbolic meaning shapes the experiences of both male and female characters. Male characters often struggle to maintain the power linked to masculine identity, and female characters negotiate their position within systems that privilege male authority. The combination of psychoanalytic theory and feminist critique provides a strong framework for this study. It makes it possible to examine how the penis

functions symbolically in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, *The Last Duty*, and *Sozaboy*. This approach also allows for an exploration of both the psychological aspects of masculine identity and the gendered power relations that influence the experiences of characters in Niger Delta literature.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research method through close textual reading of *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* by Chimeka Garricks, *The Last Duty* by Isidore Okpewho, and *Sozaboy* by Ken Saro Wiwa. The method of close reading allows the researcher to pay careful attention to language, imagery, symbolism, and narrative structure. Through this approach, the study examines how the penis symbol is constructed and how it functions within the larger themes of masculinity, power, violence, and trauma in the Niger Delta. These three texts are selected because of their strong engagement with the social and political realities of the Niger Delta and the Nigerian civil war experience. Each text reflects a different historical moment. *The Last Duty*, first published in 1976 is set during the Nigerian civil war and explores the tensions of war, betrayal, and masculine identity. *Sozaboy*, published in 1985, presents the civil war through the voice of a young and innocent soldier, using language to expose the confusion and trauma of militarised masculinity. *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* first published in 2010, moves into the post war Niger Delta and examines militancy, oil politics, and the crisis of manhood in a region marked by violence and economic struggle.

The selection of these texts from different periods is deliberate. It allows the study to trace a trajectory in the representation of masculinity and the symbolic use of the penis across time. By placing these works in context, the research shows both continuity and change in the way male bodies and male power are imagined within Niger Delta literature. This comparative approach strengthens the analysis by situating each text within its historical and cultural context while also highlighting shared concerns. All arguments are drawn directly from the primary texts, supported by relevant critical sources where necessary. This method ensures that interpretation remains grounded in the language and structure of the novels themselves.

The Penis Symbol in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*

Chimeka Garrick's *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* is a typical Niger Delta work complete with themes such as; militancy, environmental degradation, corruption, youth restiveness and the likes. It also contains a portrayal of the "mixed family system" which is a realistic depiction of the situation in the region. One major area the work delves into squarely is the effect of father figures in the upbringing of children and the impact of this upbringing on the kind of adult they become. The character Amaibi is raised by a catechist father who always shows strength and protects his family. Catechist Akassa is the embodiment of the present and active father. He not only played this role to his son but to other characters in the work, giving them necessary advice and encouraging them to further their studies. He also pushes those who could not afford the financial implications of further studies to take scholarship examinations that proved helpful. The impact of a father of this nature pushes Amaibi to develop himself and become a citizen of repute. He marries Dise, happily embraces the husband role and gets set to be the protector of his family just like his own father. To Amaibi the role of a father and a husband trumps every other role and is the essence of his very existence. Thus, when he witnesses the rape of his wife and experiences the resulting loss of the fetus in her womb, he feels an overwhelming guilt.

Amaibi feels like a total failure as he is unable to carry out the duty he views as his essence, which is that of protecting his family. This feeling of weakness and guilt is repressed by the character. He chooses silence over confrontation and ultimately loses his marriage.

Josef Breuer and Freud postulate that hysteria is not caused by the traumatic incident itself but by the persistent recollection of memories that have become emotionally charged or psychologically disturbing (1966, 5–13). This idea is evident in Amaibi's experience. He admits: "Wherever I turned, I still saw Rodman on my wife" (252). Amaibi's inability to stop seeing Rodman on his wife is directly connected to his feelings of inadequacy and his loss of sexual ability. The writer further intensifies the portrayal of Amaibi's insecurity by describing Rodman's penis as uncircumcised and haven grown unnaturally long (252). The mental picture of this entire situation is what leads to Amaibi's erectile issue according to the postulations of the psychologists. The writer uses the penis as a symbol to portray this aspect of Amaibi's life. He is unable to have an erection due to the repression of his feelings. As earlier established, the use of defense mechanisms can result in various maladies or hysteria and in this book, we see this manifest in the erectile issues experienced by Amaibi.

Anne E. Bernstein and Gloria Marmar Warner assert that, feelings of masculine inadequacy can contribute to erectile dysfunction (1981, 61). Amaibi himself states that both local and foreign doctors attribute his condition to "post-traumatic stress" (31). The writer fittingly employs the penis symbol to portray Amaibi's perceived weakness because, as established, masculine identity in the Niger Delta is often associated with sexual prowess. Sir James further reinforces this perception by creating a "complex family system" through fathering a son out of wedlock. The consequences of this system are reflected in Kaniye's life, as he is abandoned to struggle with his sick mother and only gains recognition after the disappointment of Sir James's legitimate son.

The penis symbol is therefore central to the portrayal of Amaibi's psychological state. His erection returns after he goes to prison and believes he has atoned for his perceived masculine inadequacy. He sarcastically attributes his recovery to imprisonment, remarking, "and they say there is no rehabilitation in a Nigerian prison" (31). He further describes the restored erection as a "symbol of life and defiance" (32), a significant contrast to his earlier declaration that "my spirit left body" (253) after witnessing the rape of his wife. Thus, the loss of his erection symbolizes psychological death, while its return signifies renewed life, strength, and resilience. This transformation is reinforced by his declaration, "I really decided to fight, to go down kicking" (32). His recovery coincides with his willingness to confront his guilt, reconnect with his estranged wife, and seek help from his lawyer friend, Kaniye. Through this symbol, the writer reveals the depth of Amaibi's trauma and his eventual psychological renewal.

The Penis Symbol in *The Last Duty*

Teiko maintains that "manhood is used to mean different discourses that positions men in the socio-cultural realities as dramatized in Okpewho's *The Last Duty*" (46). The critic's postulation is apt because the novel establishes a connection between the male genitalia and masculine strength through the character of Chief Toje. He embodies a conscienceless and corrupt individual who seeks power and validation at the expense of others. As a successful rubber merchant, his wealth and business acumen earn him respect within his family and community. However, when his business begins to decline because of men of integrity such as Oshevire, his sense of identity and masculine authority is threatened. To preserve his status, he brands Oshevire a rebel and engineers his detention, yet his fear of losing relevance manifests as erectile dysfunction. As Mellinger earlier postulates, the inability to

fulfil self-imposed or socially expected roles may result in impotence.

Chief Toje's condition worsens when he learns that Oshevire's case has been reopened and his efforts to prolong his detention fail. Although he attempts to project confidence through self-praise and displays of traditional regalia, he remains consumed by insecurity. His repeated complaints about the loss of public respect, including the delayed delivery of his newspaper, reveal his anxiety over his declining status. As he laments, "ever since the war came to the town, notice and respect have shifted from where they belong" (28). Likewise, the repeated expressions "They don't remember" and "they have forgotten" emphasize his fear of social irrelevance. Before asking his wife about his impotence, Chief Toje acknowledges that without the ability to perform sexually, he is unworthy of being regarded as a husband or father. The penis therefore functions as a symbol of masculine strength and social identity. Chief Toje asks:

How can a man reconcile himself to that title (father and husband) when it seems very clear to him that he no longer possesses, has completely lost-strange as it may sound to a normal mind-that power which gives the title its definition? (26).

On page 27, he admits that his loss of status is connected to the loss of his business. Although he conveniently blames this loss on the war, he expresses later that Oshevire is the root of it all. This is the reason for his fixation on his rival's wife. Chief Toje says:

For I felt that Mukoro Oshevire stood in my way. And that again is why I have not hesitated to seek carnal pleasure with his forlorn wife now that I feel my manhood flawed, my potency questioned. For it seems only in the nature of things that everything possible should be done in the interest of a reassertion of my manhood as well as pride of place... (5)

The foregoing portrays Chief Toje's insecurity and further highlights the penis as a symbol of masculine strength and social prestige. His loss of status and respect ultimately accounts for his inability to achieve an erection despite repeatedly attempting to assert his dominance through sexual relations with his rival's wife. Emuakpor the *dibia* reinforces this point when Chief Toje seeks treatment for his impotence. The herbalist remarks: "Yet at his age he should know that it was all in his mind, and try to relax. But he is too full of himself to accept any kind of handicap..." (169).

Unable to confront his own insecurity, Chief Toje projects his feelings of weakness onto his one-handed nephew, Odibo, whom he repeatedly describes as useless. Odibo internalizes these insults and accepts his uncle's inhumane treatment because he sees little value in himself. As he admits: "I know I am not worth much. Or anything. I know I cannot help myself or anybody" (60). He further observes that the insults become more frequent after Chief Toje begins pursuing Aku, Oshevire's wife, suggesting that they reflect the Chief's own threatened masculinity. The penis again functions as a symbol of masculine strength through Odibo, who transforms from the "worthless" figure on page 60 to one who attains confidence and agency on pages 179–183 following his sexual relationship with Aku. In his own words:

Now I Know that I am a man like any other man...my big strong body is no longer there for nothing – 'ineffective', as Toje has always told me to my face. For after that woman let me into her body...I felt my whole body- my whole personality- loosen and my entire being change. (179)

One can then see the relevance of the penis symbol as portrayed in the work. The writer expertly uses this symbol to touch on the key messages in the work. Chief Toje loses his mind and is ready to commit murder after discovering that the woman he has been unsuccessfully trying to have sex with has been touched by someone he has described as “worthless”. To him, this is the ultimate end to his existence and the undeniable prove of his weakness and nothingness. This is the reason why he puts reason aside and decides to take a final stand that ends fatally.

The Penis Symbol in *Sozaboy*

In Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*, Mene the major character in the work tries to find his place and his identity in the community Dukana and the world at large. Raised by his mother and unable to further his education due to financial constraints, he starts working as an apprentice to the only driver of the community-owned vehicle named “Progress”. Although this position and its prospects get Mene some respect in the community, what makes him truly respected and seen as a man in all areas is his relationship with “Agnes with J.J.C”. This is to emphasize the significance of sexual prowess to the people. Moreover, Zaza who is respected as a supposed war veteran, gets even more respect after showing off a photograph of him and a white woman and saying; “Oh yes, I fuck am well well” (33). Even Mene who sees Zaza as a useless man without a wife or children feeding off his mother starts admiring and respecting him because of his alleged liaison with a white woman. This sexual prowess trumps his experience during the world war, becoming one of the things that informs Mene's decision to join the army. In Mene's words: “I think it is good thing to fight after all. If porson will marry better woman after the fight. Oh yes, it must be good thing to fight.” (34).

This underscores the importance attached to the penis as a marker of masculinity. Regardless of their other accomplishments, the characters receive greater admiration for the women they are able to bed. Thus, a man who is otherwise underachieving is celebrated simply because he produces a photograph with a woman and claims to have “fuck am well well” (33). Similarly, Terr Kole, one of the wealthiest and most respected indigenes of Dukana, derives much of his prestige from the number of wives and children he has. In the fictional Dukana, masculine strength is closely linked to the activities of the penis; thus, even an irresponsible man like Zaza commands respect because of his perceived sexual prowess. This is further reinforced on page 18 when Mene encounters Agnes with J.J.C at the “African Upwine Bar, Diobu.” His unintended erection symbolizes his masculinity and desirability, ultimately contributing to Agnes's decision to marry him before he joins the army. As she declares, “Strong man like you cannot stay in the house” (65).

Feminism and the Penis Symbol in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday, The Last Duty and Sozaboy*

The portrayal of women in Niger Delta literature can no longer be viewed as static because of the emergence of new voices and increasing engagement with gender-related issues. Although women are still frequently portrayed as objects of male desire and gratification, the penis symbol serves as a lens through which the socially constructed weakness of the female gender is exposed. In *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, Amaibi's impotence after witnessing the assault on his wife reflects his perceived failure to fulfil patriarchal expectations of masculine protection, leaving Dise emotionally neglected. A similar

but more demeaning situation occurs in *The Last Duty*, where Aku is reduced to an object for satisfying male desire and measuring masculine power. Likewise, in *Sozaboy*, Agnes with J.J.C. is valued primarily for her physical attractiveness and her relationship with Mene, reinforcing the objectification of women within patriarchal society. The fact that there is a continual description of breasts as “J.J.C” (Fresh) adds to this objectification of the female gender. Moreover, when Mene encounters her at “upwine bar” he immediately sees her as an object to own and show off. Mene says: “him bottom dey shake as she walk. Her breast na proper J.J.C, Johnny Just Come-dey stand like hill. As I look am, my man begin to stand small small...” (13).

The writer portrays the objectification of women through Mene's erection at the bar, making the penis a symbol of masculine dominance and, from the female perspective, feminine subordination. Nevertheless, the selected texts also depict women resisting these patriarchal structures by asserting their agency. In *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, Dise leaves her marriage rather than endure Amaibi's emotional withdrawal. In *The Last Duty*, Aku reclaims a measure of control by choosing to give herself to Odibo despite Chief Toje's objectification of her. Likewise, in *Sozaboy*, Agnes influences Mene's decision to join the army, demonstrating that she possesses agency beyond her physical attractiveness. Collectively, these women challenge the patriarchal meanings attached to the penis symbol and affirm their own voices within oppressive social structures.

The penis symbol functions as a powerful literary device in the selected Niger Delta texts, representing masculinity, power, authority, vulnerability, and trauma. While traditionally associated with virility, procreation, and strength, the symbol also exposes the psychological and social burdens attached to patriarchal expectations. Through its deployment, the writers reveal how masculine identity is constructed, contested, and destabilized, while simultaneously highlighting the effects of these constructions on women and society. Consequently, the symbol deepens characterization, reinforces thematic concerns, and enables a more nuanced exploration of gender relations in the selected texts.

Conclusion

The analysis so far has highlighted the point that Niger Delta literature extends beyond narratives of environmental degradation, it further reveals that the region's literary voices engage with universal concerns such as gender, identity, power, and trauma. Through the symbolism of the penis in the selected texts, this study demonstrates how masculinity is constructed as a marker of power, responsibility, and social expectation, while also revealing the psychological and social consequences of these constructions for both men and women. The analysis shows that traditional gender ideologies often sustain oppression, inequality, and trauma, making it necessary to rethink rigid gender roles in favour of mutual respect and partnership. Therefore, the symbolic deployment of the penis enriches the writers' artistic expression, deepens characterization, and enables a more nuanced understanding of the texts and their critique of gender relations.

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