

STYLO-RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF LENRIE PETERS' POEM: *THE FENCE*

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ABSTRACT: *Many scholars have observed the general reservation/aversion most students nurse against poetry as an arm of literary studies. Some of the reasons cited for this, among others, include employment of difficult, remote and archaic words as well as complex and evasive constructions and terms. This study examines some of the prominent stylo-rhetorical devices employed by Lenrie Peters in his Poetic Piece: the Fence. The rationale is to foreground the poet's ingenuity in exploring both linguistic and rhetorical resources in driving home his message to the conviction and admiration of his readers. The chaotic state of the social order and the sorry condition of humanity in most African societies coupled with both the subject matter and language use in the poem explain our choice of the text. The paper, as an exploration of both semantic cum philosophical praxes of language use, dwelt richly on the blend of linguistic and persuasive nuances of the stylo-rhetorical characteristics of the text under study. Hence, we had cause to investigate the functional values of the salient linguistic resources employed in enacting the text. The Systemic Functional Grammar as propounded by Halliday (1978) was adopted as the theoretical framework for our analysis. Findings showed that poetry is both a linguistic and a social act, and, should be so viewed as a background to be activated for proper understanding and appreciation of our text. We found that it is not all cases of poetry that come with out-of-reach linguistic choices and usages. However, the philosophical nuances of poetry make its texts to call for special but interesting readings not common with other literary genres. This work has proved that the reservation people may have against the texts of poetry may not be so much of estranged linguistic choices and constructions as it is with the philosophical/imaginative inclinations and condiments with which the linguistic choices and constructions are woven together.*

KEY WORDS: poetry, rhetoric vs style, stylistics, lenrie peters, *the fence*

INTRODUCTION

Most often, it is not the raw contents of what we say/write or what we read or listen to that really count for meaning we read into a text, but how these pieces of information are structured and conveyed. However, in addition to the raw contents that are communicated, the rightness of mode, place, time, audience and, most significantly, how messages are relayed come under serious considerations for both the communicator and the target audience if their goal for communication must succeed. These are collectively referred to as context/contextual factors in language study parlance. It is with this consciousness that stylisticians believe that communication styles may differ according to such parametres as mentioned above viz place, time, etc. (Oloruntoba-Oju, 1999: 127). This paper is particularly concerned about the inevitability and primeness of *how* a message is

conveyed to the desired audience for a successful communication to be achieved. As a case study, the paper sets out to examine the stylo-rhetorical skills in Lenrie Peters's poem titled *The Fence*.

For one, the study hopes to extend the frontiers of stylistic studies in accounting for and underscoring the social relevance and effectiveness of the language of poetry given Lenrie Peter's communicative style and peculiarities in his poem titled *The Fence*. For another, the particular stylistic and rhetorical elements used in our text will be isolated for analysis to show their manner of employments as tools for communication and persuasion that enable the poet to succeed, in his poetic style and in passing and endearing his message to his audience. This will be shown as an account for the capacity of the poem to deliver on its communicative goals of moving the passions and sentiments of its readers towards the values/virtues adjudged the best for national ethos, progress and developments. The paper is therefore organized as follows: section 1 is on introduction, section 2 discusses poetry, style/stylistics and rhetoric, section 3 aim and objectives. Section 4 is on Lenrie Peters, section 5 examines methodology and theoretical framework, section 6 on data presentation, section 7 on data analysis while sections 8 centres on discussion of findings and conclusion.

Poetry:

Most scholars who have defined poetry have described it as an intellectual arena for showcasing the beauty and potency of the vast resources of language for artistic and communicative use. Poetry has been attested as an industry with an interface with indescribable numbers of fields of human endeavours like the philosophy of language, arts, communication, culture, politics, law, administration, stylistics, rhetoric as well as an arena for grand and elevated use of language and creativity. Bodunde (2007:230) citing Cuddon (1957) defines poetry as "a superior form of creation" and "a comprehensive term which can be taken to cover any kind of metrical composition". Bodunde submits that "what poetry is, and the function it is capable of performing depends on the attitudes, ideas and the beliefs of the poet, and it varies from one tradition to the other". One may infer from Bodunde's view the veracity and inevitability of contextual dependence of the functions, values, virtues and relevance of any poetic endeavour.

In the words of Aristotle, as echoed in Gboyega (2003:5), poetry is "the most philosophical of all things". This cannot be far from why Alabi (2017:245) considers poetry "as an outburst of a mind duly possessed by philosophical ideas wrapped in elevated language" which is "amendable to infinite stylistic investigation at virtually all levels of linguistic analysis". The foregoing does not only explain the thoughtfulness and the rationality and/or intellectualism that naturally intrinsic in any token of poetic enterprise, but is also suggestive of the moral, emotional and criticality that provide the colouration and outlook for any linguistic exercise in poetry. Consequent upon the belief that poetry transforms the materials of language into arts by enabling the intuitive language users to temporarily isolate any of the resources of language for use or analysis, language scholars hold that it also affords language users a veritable concept with which they can express the overlapping complex relationships and allow for the possible transformation that subsists among the elements of sound, morphology, syntax and meaning (Kahn, 1973: iv). It is in the light of the foregoing that the stylo-rhetorical studies of linguistic nuances of poetry as in the present effort cannot but be remarkable.

Stylistics, Rhetoric cum Poetry

As already indicated in the foregoing, the fundamental distinction between ‘what is said’ on the one hand, and how ‘what is said’ is said on the other, is the major preoccupation of stylistics as a scientific field of study of style. Stylistics is predicated on the notion that, most often than not, it is not enough for one to only be literate in the repertoire of the linguistic resources of a language, and thereafter disregards the need to be conscious of how best these linguistic resources may be processed in discourses to bring home a successful communicative goal. This is more reason scholars have opined that in any attempt to document the experiences of any nation stylistics, as a multidisciplinary endeavour, cannot but play significant roles.

Jeffries and McIntyre (2010) cited in Agbede (2016:1) affirms that “Stylistics is more interested in the systematic ways language is used to create texts which are similar or different from one another and links choices in texts to social context i.e. what a text means in the society”. When Protagoras contented that “man is the measure of everything”, he was taken to have rested his view on the belief that there was the possibility in human ability to create a particular effect with “the power of persuasion of the word” to “convince anybody about anything and let them believe that he possesses the truth” (Laurin, 2012:vi). This informs why Aristotle’s contention that rhetoric is “the faculty of discovering all the available means of persuasion in any given situation” is understood to align with Cambell’s postulation that rhetoric as “all the ends of speaking are reducible to four: ... to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move passion or to influence the will” (Ajadi, 2003:217, Laurin, 2012:iii-vi). Noting that it is important to “adopt and adapt those strategies that will best achieve our end, Laurin defines strategy as “a good rhetorical word, because it implies the choice of available resources to achieve an end”. Here come the concepts of style and stylistics in rhetorical studies.

Stylistics as inevitable arm of academic research promises an inexhaustible mine ground of investigation in language studies. The proof of this manifests in the varied number of scholars attempting to define its subject matter (which is style) in varied ways and manners. Alluding to Ogunsiji’s (2013:9) stance as cited in Ogunrinde (2016:86) will suffice in this regard. Here, stylistics is depicted as looking at style as choice, as deviation, as situation, as temporal phenomenon and, as individual. Other scholars like Leech and Short (1981) and Wales (2001:371) also cited in Ogunrinde (2016:88) are reported to have referred to style as follows:

- ❖ The perceived distinctive manners of expression;
- ❖ A situation-constrained use of language;
- ❖ The linguistic variable which marks distinction in class, gender, mood, religion, etc of the language use;
- ❖ A sum of linguistic features which characterises a field (of discourse), period/epoch, genre, etc
- ❖ A bundle of peculiar features which characterize the language of a person (author etc): idiolect, speech habits of language user;
- ❖ The choice (set of linguistic choices) made by a language user from the existing repertoire;
- ❖ Deviation from the linguistic norms which characterize the common core (langue).
- ❖ A specially packaged language which recurs throughout a passage.

Judging from the above, one will agree with Oloruntoba-Oju's (1999:127 Oloruntoba) view that "style is almost synonymous with variety", and that it is "a manner of expression which differs according to the various context" while stylistic variation may be "reckoned in terms of the socio-linguistic contexts producing the variation" as observable at any level of language analysis.

This explains why stylistic variations cannot but "be reckoned or analysed in linguistic terms (e.g. sentence type, phonological elements, morphological variety, lexical variety); rhetorical terms (e.g. figures of speech); semantic terms; and even semiotic terms as well as graphological terms. (Oloruntoba-Oju's, 1999:127, Alabi 2007:170-174). These are the different levels of analyses in stylistic studies and it is important we do a brief survey of their stakes in analyses texts:

Phonological Level:

This is the investigation of the phonetic expressive means viz-a-viz the stylistic devices in the text. Phonology, according to Crystal and Davy (1969:18), is "the study of sound system of languages and of the general properties displayed by those system. A remarkable understanding of phonology is central to an accurate analysis of the poem under study. Phonological analysis of our text will include the rhythmic, repetitive and parallelism features.

Lexico-Syntactic and Semantic Levels

This involves the investigation of the lexico-syntactic expressive means viz-a-viz the stylistic devices cum semantic implication of the text. At this level, according to Ojo (2009:21) "stylistics is concerned with the choice of words and their meanings". We must note at this juncture that words in context may acquire additional lexical meanings that are not fixed in the dictionaries. This is what we refer to as contextual meaning.

Graphological Level

Alabi (2007:170) citing Leech (1969:39) asserts that "graphology transcends ' orthography. It refers' to the whole writing system: Punctuation and paragraphing as well as spacing". Ojo (2009:19) explains that "the conventions of the written language are more stable, limited and perceptible than those of speech, and deviations from written norms are therefore going to be more obvious when they occur". According to Ojo, the choice of typography, including the way a text is laid out on the page, can provide additional dimensions to the meaning conveyed by the words and sentences. Given Ojo's explanation, one will not find it out of place to be convinced that the typographical features and structure of the poem (which are its physical properties) leaves no-one in doubt that semantic implications can be read to the physical configurations of the poem.

On the whole, Agbede (2016:iii) notes that stylistics studies the principles and effects of choice and usage of different language elements in rendering thoughts and emotions of different conditions of communication. The present paper is interested in the stylo-rhetoric analysis of the language use in poetic enterprise. It is to show how the employed resources of language relay the central message of the author's poetic product with appeals to reasons, morals and emotions of the audience. Rhetoric in antiquity is generally regarded as the precursor of stylistics (Isidore, 2010:11). Hough (1969:1-4) as cited in Isidore (2010:12) affirms that "the modern study of style, i.e. stylistics, has its roots in classical rhetoric: the ancient art of persuasive speech, which has always had a close affinity with literature". It therefore means that stylistics, rhetoric and literature can be said to share more commonalities than differences. Welleck and Warren (1978:182) as cited in Ogunrotimi and

Omotunde (2018:40) point out that “stylistic analysis seems most profitable to literary study when it can establish some unifying principles, some general aesthetic aim persuasive of a whole work”. When this is viewed in relation to Laurin’s (2016:111) assertion that “rhetoric is the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or motivate an audience” through “every kind of verbal expression”, one is assured that the trio are inseparable triplets which cannot but function in mutual complements to one another. One sees why Ajadi (2003:207) citing Pratt (1971:304) argues that “whenever we try to grasp not only the substance of what we read, but its effective relation to the structure and the style, we are making a rhetorical analysis” and that “rhetorical analysis cannot but be partly stylistic”.

The fact that poetry is believed to be probably the richest linguistic arena replete with elemental resources for style and rhetorical analysis is a proof that poetry itself is a phenomenon to be reckoned in stylo-rhetorical undertakings. In his explanation that “rhetorical parameters are employed to appeal to audience’s imagination, intellect, passion and moral will”, Ajadi (2003:207) mentioned “epigram, metaphor, simile, parallelism, symbolism” among others, as constituting the indices for stylo-rhetorical manifestations. These are the linguistic resources, which are said to be employed to transform the materials of language into art, the peak of which poetry cannot not be found wanting.

Lenrie Peters as a poet

Lenrie Peters, a Gambia, is a man of wide and multidisciplinary orientations judging from his qualifications as a surgeon, poet, novelist, playwright, educationist, activist, pan-Africanist, philanthropist, and a broadcaster. He was a former chairman of the West African Examination Council (WAEC). As a lamentation and satire, Lenrie Peters’ *The Fence* is one of such poems that decry backwardness and stagnation in the African society and the crucial need to reverse the trend in keeping with the rest of the world. As a social commentator and analyst, Lenrie Peters’ brand of poetry always centres around the needs for Africa and the Africans to be socio-culturally proactive and progressive. He has always advocated for practical development and social justice in Africa with a sense of urgency.

The Fence as a poetic product

Lenrie Peters’ “*The Fence*” is characteristically a lamentation in terms of its form.

The poet is lamenting over the man-made retrogression and hindrances with which his people are the architects of slowing down their own progress. So, the poem is a public commentary in which the word “Fence” is used to symbolize the African society’s inability to evolve and sustain categorical and steadfast socio-political, economic and moral blueprints for the driving of the society. The poet sees in Africa a lamentable society where, despite donkey years of independence, hopelessness, untruthfulness, stagnation, myopism, backwardness, inability to keep abreast of the world pace and standard and all sorts of unimaginable social vices as well as lack of courage of conviction are the orders of the day.

Aim and Objectives:

The aim of this study is to explore both linguistic and rhetorical resources employed to convey the poet’s message to the readers. The specific objectives for realizing the stated aim are to:

- i) Identify the stylo-rhetorical elements in the text;

- ii) explain the communicative strategies for the employment of the elements in (i) above;
- iii) explain the persuasive import brought to bear as a result of (ii) above

RESEARCH METHOD

The Fence is one of the sixty-nine poems contained in *Katchikali*, a Lenrie Peters' (1971) published anthology. The work, as an exercise in the exploration of language use will focus mainly on the linguistic and persuasive strategies or elements of the text under consideration. Hence, we will have cause to investigate and ascertain the rhetorical deployment of the lexico-semantic, syntactic, phonetic, as well as graphological elements of the English language as used in enacting the text as a unit of meaning. It will explore how the formal resources of the English language are rhetorically deployed for philosophical cum imaginative imports in the poetic passage of information and meaning codification. *The Systemic Functional Grammar* as propounded by Halliday (1978) and that of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* were adopted as the theoretical frameworks for analysis. Hence, the work is to show that, given the mere formal features of language use, poetry on its own will offer little or no sense of meaning and appreciation. But for functional significances of the contents and intents of any poetic enactment, contextual factors of how and why *what is said* is said cannot but be remarkable for communicative criticality.

Rhetoric

Rhetoric is a theory of language use that expound on the persuasive strategies and elements of discourse. It is said to be an essentially verbal artistry with diverse methods of achieving successful communication. The overall goal of this school of language use, given Aristotle's (its founder's) stand point, can only be understood if one views it as an interactive means of discovering meaning through language. Explaining the art of using language in the creation and sharing of knowledge and belief, rhetoric is believed to have been imbued with the essential function of language which borders on the use of language as a means of inducing cooperation among men via active application of reason to imagination for the better moving of the will. (Ede and Lunsford 1982:1, 17, Achoeah and Adelodun 2013:115).

Aristotle defines rhetoric as "the best faculty of observing, in any given case, the available means of persuasion". Hence, the Aristotle's concept of three persuasive audience appeal- logos, Pathos and Ethos and their roles in uniting both speaker and audience in the pursuit of knowledge leading to action gives a better view of rhetoric as a creative and context-sensitive theory or language use than just being a mere stylistic embellishment. They expound how communicators leverage on the available rhetorical strategies on a given situation in persuading their audience. Poets/poetry, as the most context sensitive, emotional, persuasive, creative, philosophical and intellectual users/use of literary language, cannot be exempted from this. The present study hopes it is appropriate to adopt rhetoric as a theoretical basis for analysis.

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)

SGF explains grammar from the point of view of usage with meaning-making as its major preoccupation. The SFG stresses the functionality of language in use as conditioned by the social situation surrounding the usage. It contends that abstract grammar is incapable of the requisite responses to the dynamics of the shifting contexts of language use. The foremost proponent and the

originator of the theory, M.A.K. Halliday, posits that language is “a network or systems or interrelated sets of options for making meaning”. The notion of choice is fundamental to SFG both at syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of relations. The term ‘choice’ refers to features and their selection while systems are responsible for the display of relations both at the individual categories (such as tense, number and definiteness) and at the text level (such as text function level). To Halliday therefore, text is meaning and meaning is choice. Halliday also mentions the three main functions language may be structured to achieve to include ideational, interpersonal and textual. SFG, stresses the indispensability of contextual indices for the choice of language use for the achievement of any one of these functions. The indices are subdivided under the trio of field of discourse, and tenor of discourse.

Halliday (1978), explains the field as the social action of which the text is a by-product showcasing the subject matter. The tenor is the embodiment of the role relationship among the participants which reveals the level of formality. The mode refers to the means and/or channel of communication which may be either spoken or written medium. The concept of style may be inseparable from the core postulates of the SFG because, the basic idea behind the different components of the context of situation is to underscore the relevant linguistic attachment to their manifestation in any text. The text under the current analysis, being a product of an arena/endeavor generally acclaimed the most creative and philosophical axis of language in use will benefit maximally from the theory.

Data Presentation:

The Fence:

*There where the dim past and future mingle
their nebulous hopes and aspirations
there I lie.*

*There where truth and untruth struggle
in endless and bloody combat*

There I lie

*There where time moves forwards and backwards
with not one moment's pause or sighing,
there I lie*

*There were the body ages relentlessly and
only the Feeble mind can wonder back*

There I lie in open-souled amazement

*There where opposites arrive
to plague the inner senses, but do not fuse,*

I hold my head, and then contrive

*I to stop the constant motion,
my head goes round and round,*

but I have not been drinking;

I feel the buoyant waves; I stagger

It seems the world has changed her garment

*but it is I who have not crossed the fence,
so there I lie.*

*There where the need for good
and "the doing good" conflict,
there I lie.*

DATA ANALYSIS

Phonological Analysis: Rhythm, Parallelism & Repetition

Rhythm is a strong, regular repeated pattern of sound or movement. It is a regularly recurring sequence of events. For example it is obvious that the rendition of the poem is rhythmic. The rhythmic nature of the poem's rendition is facilitated by the copious and conspicuous cases of parallelisms and repetition present all over the place in the poem. This rhythmic element presents the poem like a song. Lines 1, 4, 7, 10, 13 and 23 cited below are the cases of phonological parallelisms in the poem. Thus:

"There where the dim past and future mingle... "

"...There where truth and untruth struggle... "

"...there where time moves forwards and backwards."

"...there where the body ages relentlessly... "

"...there where opposites arrive... "

"... there where the need or good... "

Parallelism is said to be the similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases or clauses. It helps to reinforce information in discourse, just as it does in the poem.

It is believed that repetition at the lexico-syntactic level may be realized through anaphora (repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginnings of successive stages of the chosen pattern as we have in the text) e.g. the phrase "there where" which is repeated at the beginning of six successive stanzas of the poem.

Epistrophe/epiphora (a repetition of the same word or group of words at the ends of successive lines or clauses) as we have the clause "*there I lie*" repeated at the end of the first three stanzas and the last two stanzas while the sixth occur in just before the end of the fourth stanza.

Simplex (the combination of anaphora and epistrophe involves the repetition of one set of words at the beginning of a series of sentences or verse lines, and another set at the end). This is seen in the poem in the cases of the nature of repetitions of the phrase "There where" and the clause "there I lie" as explained above.

It is noteworthy that apart from the emphasis repetition causes for the subject matter of the poem (which is the inability to decide on a particular course of moral action), the repetition has rendered the poem to be musical, and the use of phonological parallelism has become highly ornamental in heightening the beauty, the sublimity and the profundity of the lines.

Lexico-Syntactic and Semantic Analysis

In the text, contextual meaning of most lexical items may be sourced from the interaction of the different types of lexical meaning, most especially that of the dictionary viz-a-viz contextual meanings. In this case, metaphorical use of lexical item can be cited in the text.

Metaphor

Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is used to represent or stand for something else e.g. the lines 17 and 19: “*My head goes round and round*” and “*I feel the buoyant waves*” respectively can only be understood in a metaphorical sense. The poet’s bid to climax his dilemma and height of confusion due to the eternal conflict between the antithetical situations and the perennial influx of most unthinkable thoughts which have left him utterly confused as to which is which, and what is the way to go can only be deduced from the contexts of such usages, as opposed to literal interpretation. Hence, both expressions connote a staggering situation and unsettled emotional state. Other cases of metaphorical usages abound in the text such as the words “mingle nebulous” “moves forwards and backwards” etc. in lines 1, 2 and 7 respectively. They refer to indistinct and unstable state of affairs.

Epithet

This is based on the interplay of emotive and logical meaning in an attributive words, phrases and even sentences. It is used to characterize an object and pointing out to the reader some of the properties or feature of an object (or situation or, abstract quality) with the aim of giving an individual perception and evaluation of these features or properties. Such words and expressions as “*dim*”, “*endless and bloody*”, “*with not one moment’s...*”, “*relentlessly*”, “*feeble*”, “*open-souled*”, “*constant*”, “*buoyant*” etc. in the various lines of the poem are lexico-syntactic elements used emotively and rhetorically to communicate the personal perception of the poet and to arouse pathos (a feeling or sorrow and pain) from the readers. Some of these usages also border on hyperbole which is a deliberate overstatement or exaggeration, the aim of which is to intensify the features of an object, and/or show its utter absurdity (<http://www.google.com/study/STYLISTICS>).

Personification as attributing human qualities to non-human being be it an object or a quality or abstract idea as though it were a living human being. This may involve the use of a words, phrases, or even clauses. One can notice the multiplicity of such cases in the text e. g. the clauses.

“...the dim past and future mingle their nebulous hopes...”

“...truth and untruth struggle...”

“...time moves forwards and backwards...”

“...world changed her garment...” etc.

The word(s) “past and future”, “truth and untruth”, and “time” have been made to exhibit the characters of living human being which they are not.

Graphology

The poem has six stanzas and six sentences of which each sentence represents a stanza. Except stanzas four and five, which are fused together ' without the usual closing remark “*there I lie*” between them, the rest are simple sentences of three lines with phrasal subjects and phrasal objects of verbs. Stanza four is a complex sentence, the fifth stanza is compound, both together making ten lines. This simplicity is for clarity and easy grasp of the subject matter. Upper cases are only

observed as the first letters in each stanza for conventionality of use. However, with a style of one unit of thought to a sentence, the seriousness of the poet's message is foregrounded and emphasized to the superlative degree, and the message will scarcely elude the immediate and direct understanding of the readers. It is also noteworthy that the poem is punctuated in a way that aids the proper projection, appreciation and understanding of the subject matter of the state of moral indecision.

CONCLUSION

The analysis carried out showed that the linguistic choices considered with their manner of usages helped immensely to project the subject matter of the poem: The characterization/satirisation of a failed society by reason of fence-sitting and indecision culminating into a chaotic socio-cultural, political and economic order is graphically foregrounded for the full attention of readers. The fuse of linguistic and rhetorical cum graphological properties of the English language have been maximally explored to magnify the subject-matter of the poem and really pushed the poet's message to the forefront of the readers' consciousness and appreciation. The rhythmic musicality of the rendition of the piece is also a matter that has given much for our admiration and memorability. Hence, Lenrie Peters, as a poet, will forever live in the limelight of his readers' memory as a writer who has been able to combine personal thought with a dynamic style of expression in his human bid to describe the social state of the human condition. The study has been able to show that readers cannot afford to underrate authors' style in their bid to decode the authors' messages. This is a contribution to the expansion of the frontiers of the study of style and language use.

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