

A SOCIO-STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF NIYI OSUNDARE'S "BLUES FOR THE NEW SENATE KING"

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ABSTRACT: *Style is an important aspect of literary analysis of text. The manipulation of words by a writer creates a distinct style through which he/she reaches out to the audience. A literary stylistic analysis of Niyi Osundare's "Blues for the New Senate King" is carried out in order to demonstrate to the readers that a poet can deploy language to achieve satirical effect. To achieve this, lexico-syntactic patterns, graphological devices, phonological and morphological choices of the poet are stylistically analysed, using the approach that describes style as the linguistic choice of a writer. The paper found out that each of the linguistic choices has identifiable function that is performed in the poem. It is concluded that these linguistic elements contribute meaningfully to the overall message of the poem which satirizes the ignominious manner in which the Nigerian Senate President assumed the leadership of the upper chamber of legislature in Nigeria for the 8th Assembly.*

KEYWORDS: Style, Literacy, Niyi Osundare, Poet, Linguistic, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

There are different scholarly views on the definition of stylistics. This is because opinions on the appropriate definition of the concept differ from one scholar to the other. It must however be stated right from the onset, that one opinion or the other links together activities being carried out in the field. The varying submissions on the concept have been proved by critical studies to be of similar messages but different voices. This paper is compelled therefore to examine some related opinions about stylistics, and its tools in the analysis of literary texts with a view perhaps to finding the appropriate instrument that could be used to analyse the poem under focus, Osundare's "Blues for the New Senate King".

Generally, style has been perceived as the way an individual or groups of people distinctly do things or perform some actions. For instance, Leech (1969) describes style as "the way in which an act is spoken, written or performed". Literally, it can be said that style is the manifestation of how a person speaks or writes. This may include his/her peculiar way of word use, sentence construction and the use of figures of speech. In his argument, Leech further refers to style as "elocution" which is a Latin term that means style and perhaps, it also means 'lexis' in Greek. In other words, elocution can be regarded as the style and diction of a language.

Leech and Short (1981) opine that the word "style" has a fairly non-controversial meaning. According to them, style refers to the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person and for a given purpose. In a similar way, Birch (1989) states that language and style never move beyond a concentration on the supremacy of words. He believes firmly that these words somehow contain meanings that manifest in ways that suggest they are different from the 'ordinary' language.

Oloruntoba-Oju (1999) believes that style is almost synonymous with variety. In other words, style refers in a simple way to the manner of expression which differs according to the various contexts. Style in this regard may be reckoned with in terms of the sociolinguistic concepts that produce the variation. For instance, styles may differ according to place (Western or African), time (Old English, new English, Classical Poetry etc.), individuality (the style of Shakespeare, style of Niyi Osundare) and modality (written, spoken, complex, poetic, informal, formal etc.). It has also been observed that the scientific study of style is known as stylistics. We may also need, in this context to provide some scholarly views about the concept stylistics, in order to give our paper a clear focus.

Widdowson (1975) defines stylistics as “the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation”. He is of the opinion that there is a relationship between linguistics and literary discourse since one helps in the analysis of the other. He states further that stylistics occupies a central place between linguistics and literary criticism and its role is to mediate between the two. Simpson (2004) corroborates this view when he opines that “to do stylistics is to explore language, and, more specifically, to explore creativity in language use”. Stylistics helps in studying the defamiliarisation of everyday language use. He states further that doing stylistics enriches our ways of thinking about language. For instance, exploring language offers a substantial purchase on our understanding of (literary) texts. According to Ekwutosi (2009), stylistics may be defined as:

a branch of linguistics which studies the features for the distinctive uses’ of varieties of language in different situations. It tries to establish principles capable of accounting for the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language.

As earlier observed, stylistics lends itself to the distinctive and typical use of language. Ohanedozi (2013) corroborates this by stating that the study of stylistics involves the study of how linguistic features are used to achieve different meanings and purposes, especially in the line of creativity. Stylistics, in other words, is applied at all levels of language analysis; phonology, graphology, grammar and semantics. All these levels of stylistic analysis are quite germane to the description of Osundare’s Blues for the New Senate King. Some of them are identified as follows:

Graphology is the particular way of arranging the printed material on the surface structure of the text. Jimoh (2013) states that “a poet normally strives to recapture the original spoken situation of a poem in the written form through the various choices he makes in the management and presentation of the graphic features such as lineation, orthography and punctuation devices like dash, hyphenation, capitalization, caption, and so on. This observation aligns with Alabi (2007), who opines that a graphological analysis of style in a text involves the foregrounding of quotation marks, ellipses, periods, hyphens, contracted forms, special structures, the full stop, the colon, the comma, the semi colon, the question mark, the dash, lower case letters, gothic and bold prints, capitalization, small print, spacing, italics and so on.

Phonology in stylistic analysis deals with analyzing pattern of sounds and the peculiar way in which an author makes use of these sounds to convey meaning. Lodge (2009) states that “phonology is the scientific study of linguistic systems, specifically the way in which sounds represent differentiations of meaning in a language”. Phonological features that are usually

considered in stylistic analysis include metre, sound pattern, alliteration, consonance and assonance.

Lexico-Syntactic Features is a combination of two features of language – lexis and syntax. Lexis is the total vocabulary that makes up a language while syntax is a set of rules that govern the structure of a sentence. Lexico-syntactic patterns may therefore be obtained through various means which include unusual or inverted word order, omission of words and repetition.

Morphology refers to word formation processes in language. Mark and Kirsten (2005) states that morphology refers to the mental system involved in word formation or to the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed”. Morphological devices in stylistic analysis include compounding, affixes (prefix and suffixes) coinages and so on.

All these levels of language analysis represent the convenient bits of language activities that succinctly provide a good background against which we can locate our views and arguments in this paper. Before we carry out our analysis, however, it is necessary at this juncture to briefly provide background information on the poet, Niyi Osundare, and his style of poetry. This, we believe, could provide insight into his motivation for “Blues for the New Senate King”.

African Poetry and Osundare’s Poetry

Poetry in Africa did not start with the coming of the colonialists. Oral poetry was part and parcel of everyday life of Africans. In fact, Oral African poets have been commenting on daily happenings in their environment even before the arrival of the colonialists. As it is often observed, art is never created in vacuum. Indeed, it will be right to say that for any literary work to be relevant, it is necessary that it bears relevance, explicitly or implicitly, to the social milieu in which it is set (Kehinde Ayo, 2005) African poetry therefore becomes a site in which the poet plays the role of a teacher that enlightens the society about what is going on in their domain. Some of these poets go beyond educating the masses to stirring up revolution in order to bring about positive change in the society. The various developmental stages of African poetry (written) reflect the historical realities of such era.

Bamikunle (1991), while commenting on the relationship between literature and history, states that art depends on historical realities from the subject matter (mankind), to the language (medium of expression) and the artistic traditions that provide the author with form and other modes of expression, to the critic and the reading public that literature needs to survive. Osundare (2008), in his monograph titled “The Writer as a Righter” rightly points out that “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”. It is from this point that we proceed to examine briefly the author’s background.

Niyi Osundare (born in 1947 in Ikere – Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria) is a prolific poet, dramatist and literary critic. He obtained degrees at the University of Ibadan, the University of Leeds and York University Canada. Previously, Professor and the Head of English Department at the University of Ibadan. He has always been a vehement champion of the right to free speech and is a strong believer in the power of words, saying, “to utter is to alter”. Osundare

is renowned for his commitment to socially relevant art and artistic activism. He believes that there is no choice for the African poet but to be political

You cannot keep quiet about the situation in the kind of countries we find ourselves, in Africa. When you wake up and there is no running water, when you have a massive power outage for days and nights, no food on the table, no hospital for the sick, no peace of mind ... (Osundare, 2014)

His works include: Songs from the Market place, Village Voice, The Eye of the Earth, Moonsongs, Songs of the season, Waiting Laughters, Midlife, Random Blues, The Word is an Egg and so on. Having said this about the African poet, Niyi Osundare, we are now solidly provided with the requisite knowledge to analyse Osundare's "Blues for the New Senate King" that is our focus in this paper.

Stylistic Analysis of Niyi Osundare's "Blues for the New Senate King"

One of the major stylistic techniques deployed in this poem is foregrounding. This is achieved through structural repetition. Some of the examples are stated below:

- He wanted so desperately to be king of senate
Haba! He wanted so desperately to be king of Senate
- He only cares for three big people: "I, Me, and Myself"
He only cares for three big people: "I, Me, and Myself"
- His feet never know the way to the house of Honour
Yes, his feet never know the way to the house of Honour

In the above extract, there is a constant repetitive use of lines if we consider the phonological structure of the poem. It could be argued that perhaps the poet uses this device to create an overall rhythm for the poem. With the repetitive use of lines, the reader is expected to get acquainted with the message as he/she reads along. The repetition of lines in this poem is also meant to draw the attention of the intending audience to the manner in which the new Senate King in Nigeria emerged. The new Senate King for instance, refused to abide by party laws and directives on the election of new officers for the Senate. Rather, he colluded with other Senators and manipulated the Senate Rules to ascend to the 'throne'. This desperate and selfish ambition is vividly captured in stanza two where the poet states that: "He only cares for three big people: "I, Me, and Myself". These are possessive pronouns which are self-referral and a personification of self-centeredness. The genesis of this possessive act has been traced to be the constant trait of Nigerian/African politicians who place their self-worth and gain above the masses that voted them into power. To actualize the stylistic use of repetitive pattern in this poem, the poet also makes repetitive use of pronouns 'He' and 'His' which are third person pronouns to show the New Senate King as being detached from the voters, You and I, that is second and first person pronouns respectively. This is meant to point to the overriding ambition and inordinate tendencies to be crowned as the New Senate King, even against the wishes of the ruling party.

There is also the use of compound words in the poem, such as "power-drunk", "power-intoxicated" and so on. The fact that these two compound words derived their meanings from the base "power" attests to the over bearing influence of power grabbing in the whole political

scenario. An average politician in Nigeria not only seeks power to amaze wealth but is also corrupt by power and intoxicated by power, just before the power corrupts him/her absolutely.

The compound words may have also been used by the poet to vividly portray the intensity of how politicians generally misuse the authority given to them by the masses. “Power-drunk” connotes politicians, who on getting to the various elective positions, seek more ways to consolidate their hold on power. This is a situation whereby the New Senate King, and by extension politicians in Nigeria generally, is never satisfied with whatever positions they are elected into. They always want more, just like the age long Oliver Twist. On the other hand, the poet also characterizes the new Senate King as “power intoxicated”. This is perhaps because the new Senate King feels so excited about this exalted position that he forgets the ‘short-cut’ and political maneuvering that brought him into power. He abandons his primary responsibility of maintaining integrity of the highly coveted seat of the senate king, by bending the rule and modifying the law to achieve his whim and caprices, a situation akin to adjusting the goal post when a match is already on.

The poet while portraying the greedy attitude of the New Senate King, also deploys collocatives to further project this avariousness of the New Senate King. Consider the following:

- A discredited enemy behind his tarnished banner
- True scion of a cold and crooked clan
- He trampled the people’s Hope in the shameful mud
- Broken banks, broken dreams, and broken lives
- He’s a fitting heir to dubious pedigree
- They plod through life like shameless masquerades

In line one, the adjective discredited is used to qualify the noun enemy. This is an attempt by the poet to reveal the dishonesty of the New Senate King. In the same line, the adjective ‘tarnished’ is used to modify the noun ‘banner’, in order to give detailed description of how the New Senate King and politicians pretend to deceive the populace in order to get to the position of authority. In line two, ‘true’ is used to qualify the noun ‘scion’ while crooked is also used before the noun clan. This is to probably portray the New Senate President in the light of a personality that comes from a generation of deceivers who professionally use falsehood as a means of livelihood. The New Senate King must have come from a family where politics is seen not only as a means to amass wealth or gain cheap popularity but also as a do-or-die affair.

In line three, ‘shameful’ as an adjective is used to qualify the noun ‘mud’. Mud is a very soft or wet earth. So, to have added ‘shameful’, it shows the extent at which the new Senate King has despaired the people’s hope of a new found ‘change’, as against a party that has governed for many years without any evidence of a desirable impact on the people. In line four, broken is repeatedly used to evoke the nouns – banks, dreams and lives. These evocations are perhaps sought by the poet to illustrate the role of the new Senate king in the moribund SG Bank that used to be a vibrant bank in the early 1990s. It is as if the poet is calling on authorities to urgently set machinery in motion to investigate the bankruptcy. For instance, the media reported that the New Senate King and his siblings took loans from the banks with low interest rate and disappeared without even refunding the principal not to talk of the interest. This was revealed while tracing the role of the New Senate President’s father who was the Chairman of the bank. This financial recklessness unfortunately led to the collapse of the

bank. The poet, thus liking the New Senate King to a sitting heir traceable only to a clan, which has fraud, deceit and dubiousness run in their vein. The adjective ‘shameless’ is used beside the noun ‘masquerade’. This is also significant. Literally, a masquerade is a dignified personality in the Yoruba cult as it is believed that ancestral spirit is hidden under the mask. In this poem, politicians are portrayed as a masquerade that hides its identity because it lacks integrity and conscience and it is afraid to publicly show his shameless face. This aptly describes the New Senate King who runs from one party to the other, perhaps hoping to get a soft landing, where looting, pilfering and impunity would be the order of the day. Unfortunately, he got it wrong in his latest party, as the party is found out to be highly disciplined and responsible. In the wake of a dashed hope, he had no other choice than to hide his face in shame, just like the masquerade.

There are a lot of foregrounded lexical items in the poem that attest to this. Examples include:

- “integrity” is visibly missing in his diction of deceit
- **PDP** in the morning; **Labour** at noon, **APC** at night
- And **WE THE PEOPLE** are the absent factor

In the first line, “integrity” is foregrounded. This is achieved by the introduction of inverted commas. It can be argued that this is meant to catch the attention of the readers who already conceive the idea that ‘integrity’ is missing in the dictionary of the New Senate King. For instance, the people know that politicians in Nigeria use all forms of rhetorical strategies to manipulate the electorates into voting them into power. No sooner they achieve their intention than they renege in their promises. The new Senate king can be likened to the charlatans that Paul says “read the scriptures but unable to come to the knowledge of truth”. (KJV, 2Timothy 3: 7). In line two, the acronyms of the political parties are given prominence by organising them in bold letters. The acronyms of the political parties are arranged in such a way that reflects how the new Senate king jumps from one political party to the other. He lacks the wherewithal to stay with his political party in the face of defeat. In line three, “AND WE THE PEOPLE” is given prominence by the virtue of the fact that it is written in capital letters. This is used to call the attention of the readers to the plight of the masses that are usually at the receiving end of bad policies made by their so-called representatives.

The poet also makes use of some figurative devices in order to attest to the questionable character of the New Senate King. Examples of include:

- He stabbed noble Faith and Trust in the back
- Wind-vane politicians with multiple tongues
- Behold the people ask:
Who will save us from our prostitutes in power?
- They plod through life like shameless masquerades
- Our rulers stink like festering corpses
- They tilt the till to their bottomless pocket
And cripple the nation with their ruinous pocket

Line one is a metaphorical statement that attempts to show the true character of the New Senate King who defected from a defeated political party to the now ruling baby. As characteristic of him, on getting to the Senate House, he colluded with members of his former party, in a marriage of strange-bird fellows, to become the New Senate King. The poet metaphorically represents how the New Senate King hurt the confidence and trust reposed in

him as Nigerian Senator. This is nothing but the definition of a traitor who only wants to realize inordinate ambition by all means. Line two is a combination of metaphor and exaggeration. For instance, the use of wind-vane and multiple tongues is an attempt to create an image of politicians that can never be predicted, while the use of “multiple tongues” is an exaggeration portraying political prostitution. In Nigeria, politicians promise the populace a good welfare package before election only to rescind when they get to their respective positions of authority. As such, it can be said that this set of politicians possess multiple tongues. Line three is a rhetorical question to which the populace should find an answer themselves. The people hope for salvation from the political prostitutes under the umbrella of a good party but become perplexed when they started to trade one political party for the other.

Line four is a simile confirming the fact that politicians in Nigeria walk through life without any bit of integrity. Notwithstanding, masquerades being feared and respected in the society, these Nigerian politicians are compared to shameless masquerades that lack respect, prestige and fear. No wonder the poet sees politicians as beings, stinking like festering corpses. In his view, they have harbored all forms of corrupt behaviours to the extent that they are now stinking. The last lines can be said to be personification. Literally, the nation does not have legs that can be crippled. As such, the poet must have used the figurative expression to illustrate the extent to which the politicians have continued to keep the nation’s money into their bottomless pocket thereby grounding the entire country to a halt. Bottomless pocket is used to represent the insatiable lust of our politicians for wealth. Their bottom pocket is every ready to accommodate as many loot of public funds as possible.

CONCLUSION

Our preoccupation, so far, has been to undertake the socio-stylistic analysis of Niyi Osundare’s “Blues for the Senate King”. In the course of the paper, we provided some definitions of stylistics and also examined some levels of language analysis that can be applied to the analysis of literary texts. These levels of language analysis (Graphology, Phonology, Lexico-Semantic features and Morphology) were explained and later applied to the analysis of the poem. Our analysis also includes highlighting the various ways through which the poet communicates his message to the audience. Through his peculiar use of language, the poet, Niyi Osundare, portrays the New Senate King’s insatiable lust for power and materials things. The poet employs the use of compound words, figurative expressions like simile, metaphor, personification and hyperbole, foregrounding, collocatives etc. Finally, it is important to state that Niyi Osundare in this poem has successfully satirized the greedy attitude of Nigerian political elite.

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