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**Literature and Development: Perspectives from Stylistics**

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**Abstract**

This study seeks solution to the problem of underdevelopment. It examines how indigenous narrative knowledge and literary information could bring development to post-colonial societies and the human society. It focuses on the role of mediatory/ternary force in stylistic analysis of texts, and it attempts an analysis of selected African texts: Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-wine Drinkard*, Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, and Niyi Osundare's *Waiting Laughters*. The study establishes/re-establishes stylistics and post-structuralism's mediatory/ternary force as significant determiners to the interpretation of literary discourse. The study finds that hidden/hitherto overlooked meanings and cultural information from literary texts could serve as tools for societal development.

**Key Words:** Stylistics, Post-colonialism, African Literature, Development, Post-culturalism

**Introduction**

The essence of the study of style is to deduce meaning, which comes in various shades, in texts. Our intention here is not to examine the nature of the various shades of

meaning, but to keep in mind that the “functional theory of language, is one about meaning” (Akekue 1990, p. 9). The major preoccupation of this work is the search for meaning in literary works – meaning that could contribute to the development of the human society.

### **Definition and Conceptual Framework**

#### **A. Style**

We begin our study by looking at some of the ideas of ‘style’ that have emerged over the ages, and we have chosen to pitch tent with Fowler’s (1966, p. 8) observation that “style resides in the manipulation of variables in the structure of a language or in the selection of optional or latent features”; and with the notion that “every analysis of style is an attempt to find the artistic principle underlying a writer’s choice of language.” Hence, the major question of the stylistician from the linguistic angle is ‘why does the author choose to express himself in this particular way?’ (i.e. by the type of word choice, deviational pattern; syntactic pattern; phonological pattern; figures of speech, etc)’ (Awokumaka, 15, 17)?”

Style thus, becomes the choice of the best lexical and syntactic resources to express a predetermined subject (Akekue1990, p. 2)

#### **B. Stylistics**

Ngara (1982, p. 11) holds that “a purely rational (scientific) analysis cannot do justice to literature because literature is not scientific and so a purely scientific approach to its study can only kill the writer’s creative effort.” For us to do justice to literature, we have to pay attention to both form and content, both of which are ultimately interconnected.

A linguistic study of literary text may help us to find out the writer’s preference of certain types of structures, signify particular cognitive tendencies, further the understanding of the writer’s intention and (greatly) condition the reader’s perspective on meaning. The student of style is interested in the statistical properties of linguistic choices, though leaving some room for the reader’s intuition and content to play some role, however small, in interpreting the literary text. Any descriptive grammar would incorporate all stylistically significant information. Thus, we are not concerned with everything that goes on in the text, but with only those features that are considered to be of stylistic importance and those that will enable us to understand the writer’s regional background, social situation and language.

### **The Role of Stylistics in Interpretation of Discourse**

Leech and Short (1981, p. 6) hold that stylistics is a dialogue between the literary reader and the linguistic observer, in which insight rather than objectivity is the

goal. A thorough interpretation of a writer's linguistic structures will tend to reveal the social values, norms and cultural preoccupations of the community in which the writer lives. The major function of stylistics is to examine how the content (of literary discourse) is expressed. The stylistician is interested in both the what and the how of literary discourse. Hence, our study is a search for hidden meanings in our selected texts and is the basis for explaining how and why those meanings are derived from the texts.

### **Objectives of Study**

The objectives of this study are:

- objective interpretation of literary structures;
- isolation of hidden and hitherto overlooked meanings from literary texts;
- retrieval of important knowledge and cultural values from the selected texts;
- increased projection or foregrounding of African cultural values before the international scene;
- identification of ways of converting literary information into exportable materials for societal development; and,
- increased patronage of African cultural values, invariably leading to an increase in the development of African societies in particular, and the human society in general.

### **Significance of the Study**

Our present endeavour is significant in the following ways:

- We are afforded the opportunity of finding ways to retrieve the knowledge and cultural values that are stored in literary works, as well as of converting them into raw materials useful for societal development.
- It serves as a veritable tool for identifying hidden meanings in literary texts.
- It is an attempt at stressing and projecting the importance of the African narrative knowledge.
- It is an attempt at emphasizing the role of literary art/studies in the development of the human society.

- It serves as another attempt at extending the frontiers of African literary theory, especially in relation to Stylistics and Discourse Analysis.
- But, much more importantly, this work should be seen as another potent voice through which the rich African cultural heritage is emphasized, projected and *commodified* for the global market.

### **Limitation of Scope of Study**

In this work, we seek to retrieve the knowledge and cultural values that are stored in literary works, with the aim of converting them into raw materials useful for societal development.

Our research is carried out from two perspectives. One, we have consulted existing body of literatures in Stylistics, Stylistic Analysis and the related field of Discourse Analysis in order to establish a theoretical framework for our study. Two, we have attempted stylistic analyses of the following literary texts: Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*, Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Niyi Osundare's *Waiting Laughters*.

Our choice of the works of these three diverse writers is motivated by our desire to spread our study to span through the period of the earliest African writers and that of the more recent African literature. Also, we have decided to cover the three literary genres: prose, drama and poetry because we intend to ascertain the extent to which literary information from the three genres of literature, and over the periods, have contributed, ought to have contributed or could be made to contribute to the development of the African society.

Also, the three authors selected are from the western part of Nigerian because of our intention to narrow the scope of our study to the cultural beliefs and practices of a particular Nigerian society. We observe that the Yoruba culture is one of the richest cultures in Nigeria; and one in which the society's literary artists have been most prolific and vociferous in the expression of its cultures, norms and values in their literary texts.

In our analysis of the selected literary texts, we have tried to limit our study to only those linguistic features of the texts that are considered to be of stylistic significance and that are capable of contributing to the meaning of the literary texts.

Thus, with the foregoing limitations to the scope of our study, we are not claiming that our work is fool proof. We are not also claiming to be proffering water-tight solution to the global problem of societal developmental. But we may feel safe to say that we are attempting to contribute our own quota to the myriad efforts at solving the endemic problem.

### **Stylistic Analysis: Review of Literature on Selected Authors**

We have reviewed the literature on each of our selected authors in the following areas:

- Themes and Commitment
- Origin and Source
- Language and Narrative Style
- Contribution to Literature

The aim is to look at the efforts that other writers/critics have made towards interpreting the works of the authors' texts, as well as the explanations that have been put forward on the identified meanings of their works. This is with a view to establishing the theoretical framework and thrust of our study.

### **Theoretical Framework and Analytical Approach**

The study specifically examines the role of the mediatory (ternary) force in the stylistic analysis of discourse. The aim is to seek for a more down-to-earth (and objective) approach to correct interpretation of a society's discourse, particularly African literary texts. This is to evaluate the place of such extraneous factors as cultural beliefs and practices, societal values and norms in the interpretation of literary discourse.

### **The Mediatory/Ternary Force in the Analysis of Discourse**

The mediatory force is the middle, intervening or interposing force that exists between the referent and its meaning, which tends to contribute to its interpretation. The ternary force refers to a force of a third order which also influences the interpretation of discourse. Both the mediatory and ternary forces have the notion of the presence of a middle or third factor, apart from the semiotic factor, which tends to colour meaning and give it other associative or connotative implication, especially in literary discourse.

Therefore, to arrive at a synchronic meaning, we must give a diachronic explanation or information as a supplement to the analysis of text. The mediatory or ternary force is considered to be an important factor in the issue of signification. Hence, it forms the basis of our study, which is aimed at ascertaining or determining how much role the mediatory or ternary force plays in the interpretation of literary discourse.

### **Some Components of the Mediatory/Ternary Force**

Some of the components of the mediatory/ternary force, which tend to render the text open, unstable and capable of various interpretations, are:

- author's historical background and environment;

- author's idiosyncrasies and personal values;
- author's intentions;
- social/political background and environment; and,
- societal/cultural values.

All these tend to dictate the author's choice of language, imagery, metaphors, and style generally, and consequently determine the tone or direction of literary interpretation. Hence, to correctly interpret a society's literary works, we need to understand those socio-cultural values that most probably inform such works. And, in order to have adequate access to the meaning of African literary texts, the works need to be subjected to thorough stylistic analysis, thereby giving opportunity for diachronic explanation as supplement to synchronic analysis of texts.

### **Literary Information for Societal Development**

More than ever before, knowledge is becoming synonymous with power. And individual societies are transferring knowledge into commodity with which to colonize other societies, by resorting to areas where they have comparative advantage over others. Hence, the western world, especially America, has continued to colonize the world through scientific knowledge.

But,

whereas the western world has championed the cause of information technology for global advancement, 'Africa...has only its culture to float on the sea of technological current' (Obobolo 1998, p. 109; Mowah 1990, p. 9).

Thus, the African is expected to seek for ways of spinning the web of culture in the process of sustaining his identity, and to convert culture into a marketable commodity in the global market. Unfortunately for the Africans, the chaotic mode of existence in African societies today has made it difficult for them to evolve new ideas or fresh metaphors that can justify the force of culture. Instead, "they allow themselves to be caught in the throb of post-modern demystifying drive rather than creating new signifiers that can challenge the failure of their government and society" (Mowah 1990, p. 9).

Fortunately, however, the African societies are blessed with abundant narrative knowledge that could help to validate scientific technology and serve as an invaluable commodity in the global market. The task is on how to find ways to create myths that can validate technology or how to transform values (especially cultural values) into catalysts for societal growth and development.

Fortunately, again, for Africa, and for the world, the African literary artist, the major custodian of culture is believed to have taken up the challenge of creating new

myths and metaphors for validating technology. Hence, this study is out to evaluate the extent to which African literary artists have created new myths and metaphors through which they have effectively commented on the African situation and the universe in general.

### **Analytical Approach**

To succeed in our task of investigating the relationship between content and formal structures, we have examined our selected texts from the perspectives of:

- graphological devices;
- lexico-semantic devices;
- phonological devices;
- syntactic devices;
- authorial idiolect and neologism; and,
- literary devices and figures of speech.

This approach to analysis is aimed at adequately equipping both ourselves and our readers for better understanding and appreciation of our selected texts, based on a more-informed appreciation of the writers' regional backgrounds, social situations and language.

### **Findings**

Findings from Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*

To depict the African's determination to speak, be heard and understood, Amos Tutuola employs the following foregrounding techniques to reflect the tendency of the African man to emphasize and foreground his message through the use of sign-posts to guide his hearers/readers towards understanding his story:

- Numerous attention-catching capitalized headings and sub-headings.
- Extensive use of repetition to reflect the nature of the African to repeat, emphasize and reiterate.
- Use of language as a tool for blending the oral and literary traditions for optimum self-expression. He does so by experimenting with the art of telling/writing a story through direct speech – the traditional story-telling monologue.
- Direct transliteration from his mother tongue, the Yoruba, into English, as it does not pay attention to the differences in the grammar of the two languages.
- Rich paraphernalia of African culture, norms and traditions as are always found in African folktales, myths and legends.
- An archetypal image of a young palm-wine drinkard (an image of a post-colonial African society), which, though obviously having the aimless

ambition of going in search of his dead palm -wine tapster in the dead town, ultimately ends up becoming the benefactor and saviour of a community (the human society) that is plagued with disease and death.

Thus, Tutuola employs deviational techniques that call attention to his special mode of expression – an expression that reflects the pre-independent Nigerian society in which the denigrated African had something to say, and he said it very emphatically regardless of his grammatical and socio-political limitations, that are as a result of his low education, the colonial experiences and the imposition of the foreign languages on the colonized African societies. Tutuola also foregrounds in various ways the message that the seemingly insignificant post-colonial African societies may eventually become the saviours of the human society. And for this to happen, the African societies must create or locate a myth/product with which to address the perennial issue of global development.

#### **Findings from Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman***

Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* presents the contrasting picture in which he places two divergent cultural worlds side-by-side and invariably foregrounds the cultural vitality of the African world and presents it for global consideration and patronage. And he does this through the use of the following various foregrounding techniques in the text:

- Through parallel and repeated structures and emphatic use of language; he exhibits and calls attention to such rich cultural heritage of the African societies as the brightly coloured clothes like sari, sanyan and boa-skin, together with the beautiful African designs that can match and compete favourably with other high quality clothing of other nations of the world.
- By painting a contrasting picture of the exhilarating and highly spirited world of the Africans against the highly reserved, dull and imperfect world of the Britons; and by presenting such musical elements as songs, chants, eulogies and drumming, Soyinka clearly foregrounds the musicality of the African traditional festivals before the literary world, and consequently, calls attention to the rich cultural values of the African societies that reside in them.
- Through the extensive use of the verse form by such custodians of culture as Elesin Oba, Iyaloja and Praise Singer, Soyinka displays the traditional wit and orality of the Africans. The verses are very rich in the resources of the traditional African (Yoruba) language – a language that serves as a repertory of African proverbs, parables, riddles, poems, songs and incantations. Through these, Soyinka expresses some of the basic truths of life as well as presents various African worldviews to his readers.



- Through extensive use of hyphenated words, Soyinka reflects the descriptive nature of African languages and the tendency of the African to describe what he sees through comparison.
- By presenting characters like Sergeant Amusa and Joseph, who could not clearly express themselves with the English Language, Soyinka emphasises the observed limitations of the African natives in relation to self-expression. Hence, Soyinka invariably suggests a re-reading of African verbal expressions, oral narratives and written works, with the belief that the African man has more things in his mind than what he expresses because of the variegated constraints that confront him in the use of the foreign languages as his medium of expression.
- Through his peculiar use of language, Soyinka reflects the awe and reverence that the Africans have for their traditional and cultural institutions and customary responsibilities.
- By employing such other elements of language as aphorisms, maxims, epigrams and philosophical statements that are timeless and spaceless, Soyinka invariably advocates for a dismantling of the geographical and metaphorical maps and boundaries that tend to limit and hinder inter-personal, inter-ethnic, inter-tribal, inter-national, inter-continental and inter-racial relationships. Hence, the author advocates for a global man who is free from imperial harassment, and does not feel threatened by the traditional and cultural beliefs and practices of others.

Thus, Soyinka employs a wide variety of deviational/formal techniques to put across his unique vision of death and to present the rich cultural beliefs, practices and worldviews of a post-colonial African (Nigerian) society to the world for consideration and patronage.

#### **Findings from Niyi Osundare's *Waiting Laughters***

On his part, Osundare employs different graphological patterns, in addition to the normal poetic verse pattern, to paint pictures of what he says.

- He uses his scattered poetic pattern to depict the ravaging effects of the harried season and makes the point that it takes a plundered literary form to reflect a plundered post-colonial society, and invariably opines that poetry cannot be tied to a particular verse or idiomatic form.
- He clearly deviates from the lineational norm in order to stretch language to reflect the fact that the dilemma of the post-colonial African societies is that of endless waiting both for better conditions and for the recovery of their lost identity.

- He employs lexical crampling to emphasise the great length of time that the African continent has suffered dispossession and humiliation in the hands of the western colonial/slave masters.
- He employs such morphological devices as truncation of words as a convenient handle for reflecting his intended phonological quality and to give entirely new meanings to words than they ordinarily would not have.
- He uses a number of affixes, compounding, functional conversions and derivations; just as he also uses taut, compressed and incomplete syntax to achieve economy of space and expression, as well as attitudinal function. By so doing, Osundare expands the expressive possibilities of language, just as he expresses the Yoruba socio-cultural worldview.
- Osundare's use of Yoruba words, terms, utterances and songs is aimed at reflecting the local colour and the rich cultural inclination/heritage of the Ikere background from which he writes.
- By extensively using the phonic and musical elements of the Yoruba (Ikere) mythology, the author reflects the musicality of the Yoruba language and the oral tradition of the African society.
- Through extensive use of parallel structures, Osundare builds up chains of ideas that are interrelated or parallel to one another and thereby creates aesthetic and linguistic structures that reinforce the ideas or themes of deception and waiting that run through the entire text.
- Through extensive use of rhetorical questions and interrogative structures, Osundare ponders over unsolvable riddles of life, particularly the many irresolvable challenges or problems that the African man must continue to grapple with in the face of heartless and unrepentant leadership.
- Osundare employs a number of chiasmic structures and metaphors to make the statement that both the metaphor of our strength (i.e. our physical, mental and spiritual energies) and the strength of our metaphor (i.e. products of our abilities) should be exploited for possible solution to the myriad of apparently unsolvable problems that are confronting the African man.
- Like Soyinka, Osundare also employs metaphorical imagery both as grand-techniques and as part of his meta-language features. For instance, with the image of the time-tempered boil that is about to burst, he reflects a Nigerian society that has become so petrified and time-tempered.
- Through other various images: of creativity, boredom, tiredness and drowsiness, confusion, sluggishness, violence, suffering and oppression, deprivation, political arrogance, uncertainty and hope, Osundare creates mental pictures of the various experiences of the Nigerian citizenry, and thus, establishes memorable and enduring literary legacy.

With all the various linguistic and literary devices employed by Osundare in *Waiting Laughters*, we may say that he has succeeded in drawing attention to, and expressing his unique vision of the winnowing experiences of the post-colonial African (Nigeran) society, especially regarding the various inhuman oppressions that the people have suffered in the hands of the colonial and neo-colonial oppressors, as well as attempting to suggest possible solutions to the multi-varied Nigerian socio-political problems.

Also, Osundare has successfully employed his mode of expression to extol the rich cultural heritage of the African societies, as well as suggest some ways through which the African cultural wealth and values could be floated for their patronage in the global community.

### **Conclusion**

In the course of our study, we have been able to establish/re-establish the following facts:

- that linguistic theory can indeed be used to explicate literary structures and that stylistics plays a significant role in the objective interpretation of literary discourse;
- that there is the presence of post-structuralism, mediatory and ternary forces which largely play a role in the objective interpretation of literary discourse;
- that some hidden or hitherto overlooked meanings and very important cultural information or knowledge can be retrieved from literary texts that can serve as veritable tools for societal development; and,
- that the African narrative tradition and cultural values can indeed be converted into lucrative commodities for export in the global market, as itemized below.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

Literature is indeed, a major custodian of culture; and consequently, African literature is a major custodian of African culture. Hence, we must begin to critically explore the African oral narrative knowledge, especially as employed in African literary texts, with a view to coming out with the rich African cultural values and projecting them before the international community.

Therefore, the African literary writer should reflect more of the African cultural values in his writings, and the readers of African literary texts should be more purposeful and objective in their approaches to reading. With these, we will be able to evolve a strident voice for the articulation of the values of African societies.

The followings are some other ways of converting literary information into exportable materials for societal development:

- African languages are repertoires of African cultural beliefs, practices and values. Hence, efforts should be made by organs of government and the academia to develop African indigenous languages both for national and international recognition.
- African songs and dances are very rich in African cultural values. Currently, African musical artistes (especially Nigerians) are taking the centre stage at the global music scene. Therefore, more efforts should be made by government and corporate individuals to encourage and sponsor these ambassadors of African culture to give their very best to the global community. The musical artists should also recognize that much of the resources for their songs are contained in African literary works. They should therefore, make their songs richer by reading and researching into African literary works.
- Traditional African clothes and designs have been a powerful medium for cultural expression. Therefore, efforts should be made by African textile designers and the fashion industry to liaise with the literary world in order to come out with richer designs and products for the global market.
- As noted in Osundare's text under study, the back of the postage stamp is a powerful platform for the display of cultural wealth. Therefore, the post-colonial African societies should take advantage of this opportunity to sell their culture to the world. Hence, the art of philately needs not become an extinct practice in the African societies.
- National currencies have also become a powerful medium for cultural expression. Therefore, the African societies should do more about foregrounding and projecting the African cultural values through their currencies.
- The internet has become a major playfield for cultural expression. And it is observed that the African societies have not been able to take full advantage of this medium to float their cultural values before the global market community. Therefore, custodians of culture in African societies should wake up to this modern technological reality, and project the rich African cultural practices and values to the world.
- The tourism industry has become a major foreign exchange earner for many nations of the world. And since many African traditional festivals and practices are very rich, colourful and attractive, the African societies could develop and transform their festivals into tourist attractions before the world. Examples are the annual Argungun fishing festival and the recent Calabar, Abuja and Port Harcourt carnivals.
- Important knowledge/cultural values retrieved from literary texts could be packaged as attractive marketing materials for international patronage. For example, such international service providers as Coca Cola, Pepsi, MTN,

GLOBACOM, automobile manufacturers and many other product brand owners have greatly applied information on societal/cultural values to advertise their products and appeal to the various socio-cultural groups all over the world.

- African literary works are supposed to be good sources of funds and economic empowerment for the individual literary writers, the African geopolitical nationalities and the human society at large. Hence, concerted efforts must be made by all and sundry to embrace the reading culture in order to encourage our writers to keep on writing.

### **Contributions to Society and Knowledge**

We must however, reiterate that for all the above suggestions and recommendations to be fully utilized, African literature and the oral narrative tradition must be given opportunity to play their pivotal role of serving as the source materials for all the various media of cultural expression. It is our belief that these suggestions, if taken and utilized, will help bring about speedier development of the post-colonial African societies in particular and the human society in general. But if for no other reason, this research work serves as another attempt at emphasising the role of literary art/studies in the development of the human society. It serves as another attempt at extending the frontiers of African literary theory, especially in relation to Stylistics and analysis of discourse. Much more importantly, the work should be seen as another potent voice through which the rich African cultural heritage is emphasised and projected for patronage at the global cultural market.

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